CHARIOT OF DEATH by DON WILCOX

# fantastic ADVENTURES

AUGUST
25c

## THE STAR SHEPHERD

By WILLIAM BRENGLE

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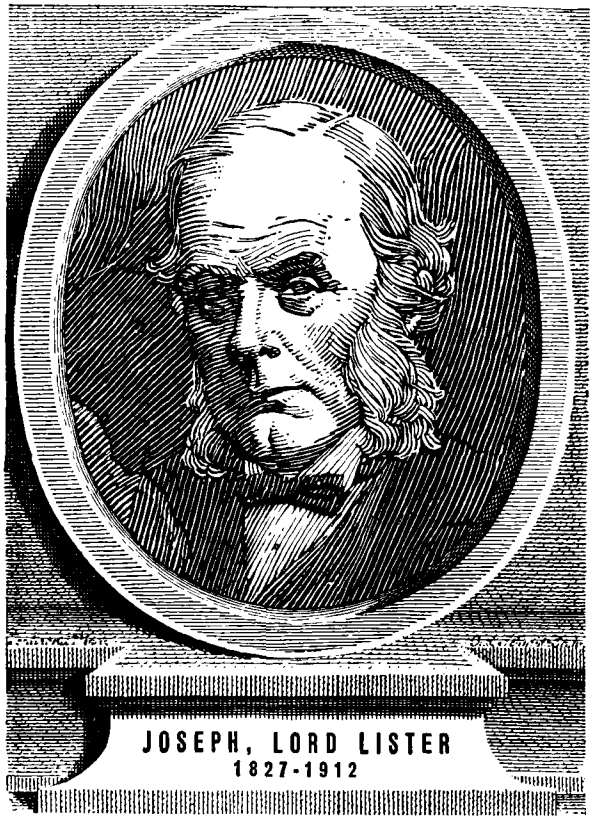


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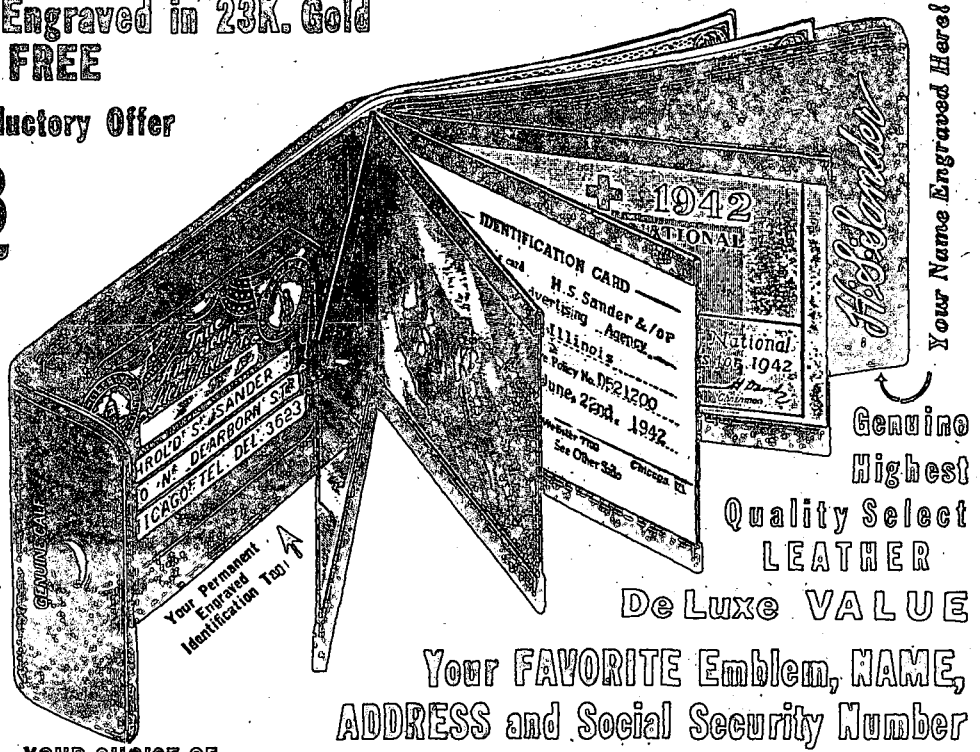


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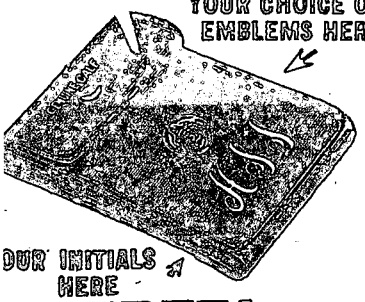


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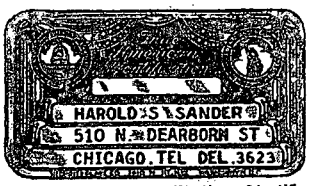


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AUGUST 1943

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from "The Star Shepherd." Back cover painting by Malcolm Smith, depicting "Warriors of Other Worlds." Illustrations by Magarian; Malcolm Smith; Ronald Clyne; H. W. McCauley; Robert Fuqua; Virgil Finlay; Rod Ruth


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AUGUST 1943

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 540 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. Washington Office, Earle Building, Washington, D. C. Special Washington representative, Col. Harold E. Hartney, Occidental Hotel. London editorial representative, A. Spencer Allberry, Chandos Cottage, Court Road, Ickenham, Uxbridge, Middx., England. Entered as second-class matter April 16, 1940, at the Post Office, Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3rd, 1879. Subscription $2.50 a year (12 issues); Canada, $3.00; Foreign, $3.50. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, 540 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

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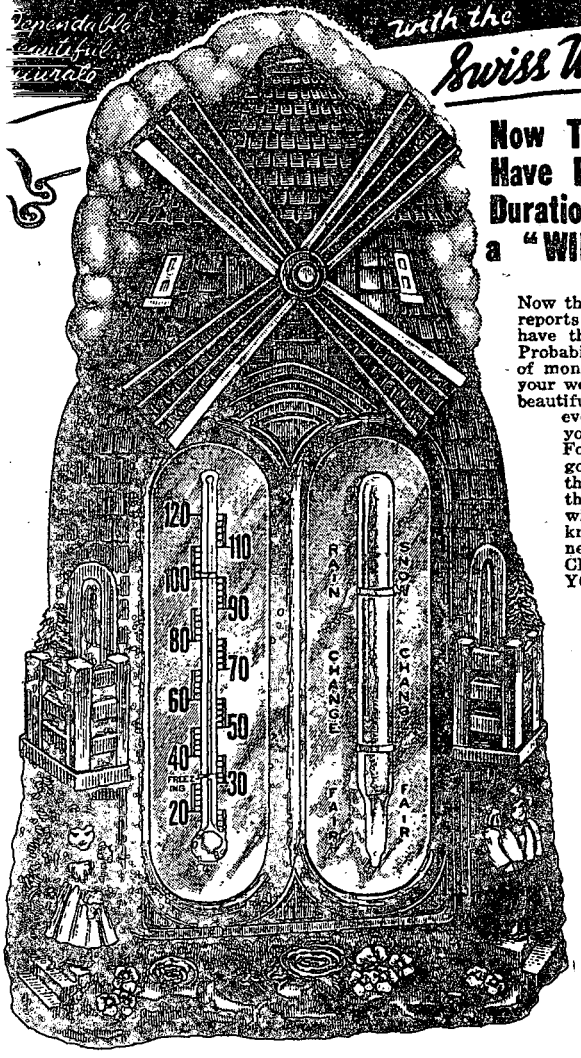


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# The Editor's Notebook

## A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

IN THIS department we usually try to tell you black is white, and mostly you don't believe it, but we'll take another stab at it—knowing that we've got some pretty potent ammunition to slam away at you.

FIRST big salvo to fire at you is a novel (always good, eh?). That novel is Don Wilcox's latest. "Chariot of Death" is the title. Don gives this that "something" that made us pick him up in the first place. We can't define it, so we won't try. You just read the story, and you'll get it better than we can describe it to you. It is just faintly suggested by Wilcox's theme—the Lord of Temporary Death—which you'll admit is nothing like anything you've heard of before.

NEXT big gun is the cover story—written at your request by William Brengle who made a hit with his Lilliput story. "The Star Shepherd" is written to fit a cover by Robert Gibson Jones, which in its turn was painted so that the issue appearing on the stands July 4th would carry an American flag (noticed the flags on magazine covers this month?). In a way, this story is Brengle's answer to a challenge. You readers sorta hinted . . . "could he do it again?"

"Great Zeus! These shoes are killing me!"

ALWAYS a good shot is Lefty Feep, you'll admit. Robert Bloch's newest Feep is titled "You Can't Kid Lefty Feep" and in this story he means that quite literally, as you'll find when you read a mighty funny yarn!

THERE'S a lot of shooting, too, in Leroy Yerxa's "Phantom Commando." We recommend it because it's pretty timely—and besides, it's one of those ghost-fantasy yarns that always send funny little chills racing up and down our spines.

HAROLD LAWLOR took a lot of pot-shots at your editor in writing "Dinky Winky Woo." In fact, he wrote it several times trying to get it to suit us. Well, his marksmanship was okay on the last shot, and it's another sale for a pupil of Don Wilcox. The hero of the story loves little dogs, by the way. . . .

OUR stock of McGivern stories is still holding out—"World Beyond Belief" is proof of that. We blast you this time with a yarn that has everything Bill can put into a story—plus one of the oddest pulp situations we've ever seen. You'll like this one. It's right between the eyes!

LASTLY (and we've saved a broadside!) is Tarleton Fiske's "Fairy Tale." Here's a fairy tale told only as Fiske can tell 'em! It's the first of a group of Fiske yarns with real sock. We got a pleasant surprise when these turned up in the mail—and you'll be as pleasantly surprised, take it from us.

WHICH concludes our rash statement section of the Notebook . . . now the rest is up to your fan letters.

MALCOLM SMITH comes back with another "Warriors of Other Worlds" back cover painting, and this one is one of his best. We have more coming up, and we intend to alternate them with more of Frank R. Paul's ancient gods. Paul gave us a welcome surprise by finding time down there in Florida to sandwich a few paintings in between diagrams for battleships and stuff.

WE are still getting letters for the Correspondence Corner, in spite of the monthly announce-

*(Continued on page 64)*



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# The Magic of Mind

WERE the great personages of the past victims of a stupendous hoax? Could such eminent men of the ancient world as Socrates, Pericles, and Alexander the Great have been deluded and cast under the spell of witchcraft—or did the oracles whom they consulted actually possess *a mysterious faculty of foresight?* That *the human mind can truly exert an influence over things and conditions* was not a credulous belief of the ancients, but a known and demonstrable fact to them. That there exists a wealth of infinite knowledge just beyond the border of our daily thoughts, which can be aroused and commanded at will, was not a fantasy of these sages of antiquity, but a dependable aid to which they turned in time of need.

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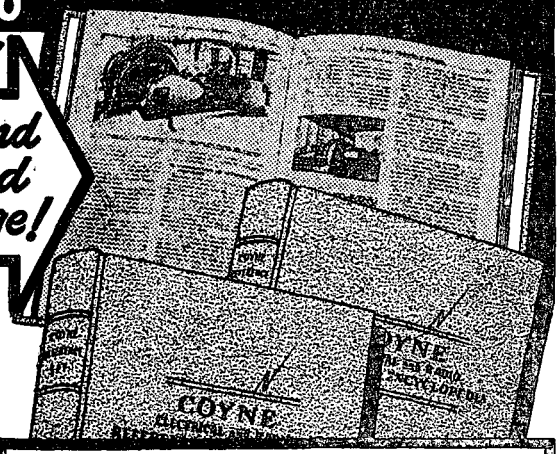


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# THE STAR SHEPHERD

By

## WILLIAM BRENGLE

"FATHER! Father! They're coming! Father!"

The shrill, shouted words came, thin and high-pitched, through the open parlor window of the little white stone house, cutting into silence the solemn-pitched voices of the six men and two women assembled there.

One of them, a tall, queenly woman in her late thirties, was the first to speak.

"It is John!" she exclaimed, her dark, flashing eyes noting the expressions of alarm on the faces of the others. "He must mean the Nazis are here!"

Her husband, a thick-set, wide-shouldered man in the rough, sturdy clothing of a Greek peasant, came out of his chair with an agility that belied his bulk. With two giant, cat-like strides, he crossed the room and drew open the door as running feet pounded on the small porch.

A slender boy of thirteen burst through the doorway. His handsome, olive-skinned face was streaming with perspiration brought on by his frantic dash up the steep, winding path from the roadway below.

For a moment, the boy was too winded to speak. His father encircled his trembling shoulders with one brawny arm, while with his free hand he stroked the youngster's thick growth of curling black hair.

"It's . . . the Germans . . . Father!" John Dethenos panted at last. "Ten or twelve of . . . them. On horses, com . . . ing up the road!"

George Dethenos' strong lips tightened into a grim line below his thick, black mustache. Angry blood darkened the skin of his swarthy, weather-beaten cheeks.

He released his son and turned to the group of his friends and neighbors. With a feeling of quiet satisfaction, he saw that there was nothing of fear in the eyes or expressions of the six men —only strength and determination . . . and hatred for a common foe.

"In some way, they have learned

**The phantom bowmen of Mons were only a dream compared to what happened on the plains before the mount of Delphi's oracle!**



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A blast came from the trumpet of the god-like man



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about us," he growled. "They must not find you here. Your horses are saddled and ready behind the house. Ride at once into the hills. The house will keep you hidden from the road long enough that the Nazis will not see you go."

"Perhaps, George," said one of them, "you and your family had best come with us. They may take their disappointment at not finding us out on you and yours."

Their host shook his head. "The Germans can know nothing. They can guess; they can suspect. But of proof —there is none."

He looked over his shoulder to where young John stood stiff and silent, recovered, now, from his exertions.

"Were the Germans near when you saw them, my son?" he asked quietly.

The boy shook his head. "Perhaps six kilometers. I saw them from the top of Crisa Hill. They had just entered the valley."

George Dethenos was satisfied. "Then there is time to spare. We shall assemble, three days from now, at your home, Alexis Prythanix. Then shall we finish our plans for the destruction of the Nazi arsenal at Navpaktos."

PRYTHANIX, a small, almost dapper man rubbed a shapely hand over his smooth-shaven face and looked doubtfully at his friends.

"It might be better to wait even longer than three days, George," he demurred. "If the Nazis suspect us, we must take no chances."

"No." Dethenos' response was instant. "We dare not delay too long. Almost two months ago the fighting men of England and America tore Crete from the Hell-begotten sons of Attila. Any day now, they may seek to cross the straits to drive the invader from the sacred soil of Greece. Every arsenal we fire, every bridge we destroy, every German we slay will bring nearer the liberation of our homeland and the final defeat of the barbarians.

"No; three days are long enough to wait. Go now—all of you. And when the Nazis come . . . what can I—a poor peasant of Greece—tell them?"

As the five men rose silently to their feet and started for the rear of the house, one of them hesitated, then turned back. He was older in years than his companions, and walked with a limp as the result of a tumble down the side of Mount Parnassus long before. But his back was as straight, his arms as muscular, as the youngest of the group.

"George," he said, " if you are determined not to come with us, at least send your wife and children away until these Germans have questioned you and gone. You know how they are with women; it is not good that they should see Margaret and Myra."

George Dethenos laid a friendly hand on the older man's shoulder and urged him gently after the others.

"My heart is warmed by your concern for my family, Resan Soubosko," he said. "But long ago it was agreed among the four of us that fear of the Huns would never drive us to flight."

Together, father, mother, son and daughter watched their five guests ride into the valley and disappear from view around a shoulder of a high hill. John Dethenos, legs spread in unconscious imitation of his father's stance, squared his boyish chin that already was taking on the strong lines of manhood.

Suddenly the sharp clatter of horses' hoofs sounded on the packed earth at the front of the house, and a voice, thick with German accent, called out:

"Ho! The house! Show yourselves, Greek scum!"

A smile touched the lips of George Dethenos, though a blaze flickered in

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his black eyes. "Come," he said to his wife. "Our enemies have come to visit us. We must not keep them waiting."

Heavy boots sounded on the porch as George Dethenos crossed the parlor and opened the front door. Three men in the dark green field uniforms of the German Army were standing there, while another eight were with the horses in the yard.

"Herr Dethenos?" said one of the three briskly.

The Greek bowed stiffly, his olive-skinned face impassive. "I am George Dethenos," he said.

"*Gut!* You are the man I have come to see. I am Leutnant Ludwig Scholle." He clicked his heels and bowed briefly. "May we enter?"

He seemed as affable as he was polite; but Dethenos saw beneath the surface of the thin, almost cadaverous face and the deep-set, burning eyes—saw the arrogance and contempt that would require little prompting to become openly evident.

Dethenos stepped aside. "Of course. You are welcome."

THE officer and his two aides came into the room and the Greek closed the door. Scholle said a few words in rapid German to his companions, then turned to face the other occupants of the room.

The piercing blue eyes swept over the seated figures of the two women.

Dethenos murmured, "My wife, Margaret, and our daughter, Myra."

Leutnant Scholle bowed and clicked his heels to each. "*Frau* Dethenos; *Fraulein*. I am honored."

The older woman said, "Good afternoon, Leutnant. Won't you be seated?" and went back to the needlework in her slim, work-roughened hands without waiting to see if the gaunt-faced man availed himself of her invitation.

Leutnant Scholle flushed slightly and took the proffered chair. At the door, the two soldiers stood stiffly at attention. A strange, charged silence filled the room.

For Leutnant Ludwig Scholle had seemingly forgotten why he was at the farm house of George Dethenos. His bloodless lips were parted slightly and his sunken eyes were fixed in unblinking fascination on the face of Myra Dethenos.

The girl, not yet eighteen, bore the intense stare with an equanimity beyond her years. She sat with her hands folded in her lap, her slender shoulders stiffly erect under the immaculate whiteness of a simple blouse. Her hair fell in a soft brown wealth of curls to her shoulders, framing the lovely oval of a perfect-featured face. Her skin had nothing of the olive tint of her parents and brother; instead it was fair almost to the point of paleness. Her eyes were large, well-formed, brown and intelligent.

George Dethenos said, "What can we do for you, Leutnant Scholle?" with a harsh inflection to the words that jerked the officer's eyes to him.

"Forgive me, Herr Dethenos," he said contritely. "Your daughter is so —so unexpectedly lovely that I did not realize how rudely I acted. It seems strange—again forgive me—that she so little resembles her parents. Her coloring, her features, are worthy of one of the *Herrenvolk*."

Margaret Dethenos answered him.

"Myra is a direct descendant of the Pythia," she said proudly. "Not more than once in a hundred years does the matchless beauty of the Pythia reappear."

"Pythia?" echoed the lieutenant, interested. "Who are they?"

The strong, handsome face of the woman seemed queenly, majestic. "The

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Pythia were servants of the oracle in the long-dead days of Greece's glory," she said. "Legend has it that the god Themis spoke through the lips of the Pythia from whom descended my people even unto Myra."

"I see," Scholle said hastily. "How very interesting. . . . And now, Herr Dethenos, it is time we discussed the little matter that brought me here."

MARGARET DETHENOS' tranquil expression betrayed nothing of her contempt for the German's reaction to her explanation of the Pythia. Let the barbarian think her mad! What could he, whose forefathers were as beasts of the forest when Greece was the center of world civilization, know of such things?

She cast a tender glance at the serene beauty of her daughter. *Herrenvolk*, indeed! The best of them was not fit to touch the hem of Myra's skirt!

". . . has come to us," the officer was saying, "that you have knowledge about these acts. And so, *Mein* Herr, I have come to you for their names."

Dethenos scratched his chin and tried to look a little stupid. "But my dear Leutnant," he said, spreading his hands, "I know nothing of such lawless acts. None of my friends would do such things. All are simple farmers, whose sole interest is to till their fields and raise their herds to provide food for their families."

Ludwig Scholle crossed his thin legs and swung a booted foot gently.

"Herr Dethenos," he said, abruptly changing his point of attack, "you are aware of the ban placed on private ownership of radios and arms, *nicht wahr?*"

An expressionless mask seemed to settle over the features of the Greek farmer. "I know of the order."

"And you have complied with that ban?"

Detheno bowed his head. "I am at all times anxious to observe the rules put into effect by the German Occupational Forces."

Scholle smiled. "Excellent. Then you will have no objection to a search of your home and out-buildings?"

The slender, capable hands of Margaret Dethenos never faltered over the needlework as she heard the words. Beneath the flooring directly under her chair were an excellent short-wave radio set and four British-made rifles with 500 rounds of ammunition.

"I would welcome any search, Herr Leutnant," Dethenos said gravely. "It will serve to show you that I am but an honest farmer with no thought of intrigues against my country."

For a long moment the eyes of the two men locked; then Scholle rose from his chair, went to the door, opened it and said a few word in German to the soldiers in the yard. Immediately the men set out at a business-like pace for the barn and the two smaller outhouses.

Closing the door again, the German officer ordered his two aides to search the house itself.

They were nothing if not thorough. Every room, every closet and cupboard, every shelf and drawer, nook and cranny were investigated completely and systematically. They sounded the walls and ceiling, peered up the chimney of the huge wood-burning fireplace and pounded on the flooring. George Dethenos politely left his chair to give them room for the latter inspection; but the two women remained seated, nor did the searchers attempt to disturb them.

Finally, the pair desisted from the hunt and turned empty-handed to Scholle.

"*Da ist nichts*, Herr Leutnant," one of them said.

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The officer nodded absently and waved him away, then turned to the thick-set Greek.

"I am satisfied, Dethenos," he said lightly. "We shall not trouble you further. And now, if your wife and your daughter will get their things together, we shall be going."

THERE was a moment of shocked, incredulous silence. A slow wave of red crept up from beneath the open collar of the farmer's shirt to suffuse his cheeks. Margaret Dethenos placed her sewing on the table, turned in her chair and gently took hold of one of her daughter's hands. The girl seemed unaware of the gesture; she was staring with wide eyes at the smartly uniformed officer.

"I do not understand, Herr Leutnant," the Greek said heavily. "Why should they get their things together?"

Scholle said blandly, "Because they are going with us. They shall be held as prisoners until your memory returns, my dear fellow. You see, we want the names of the saboteurs who have been meeting here."

George Dethenos lumbered to his feet. In the slow, almost clumsy movement was so strong an element of menace that the hands of the two aides went quickly to the butts of their revolvers.

He said, "I have told you, Leutnant Scholle, that I know nothing of such men. You have no proof that what you say is so.

"But this I do know: If my wife and my daughter are taken from me, then so much trouble will come down upon you from these hills that you will curse the day George Dethenos was born!"

The officer's instant anger showed as a flickering light in his deep-set blue eyes.

"I shall remember that, Herr Dethenos," he promised icily. "And the first such act of violence from the natives of this district will mean these women will be given to our soldiers!"

Without awaiting a reply, he turned to the two soldiers, and snapped:

*"Bringen sie die Frauen!"*

The two Germans stepped forward, each to grasp an arm of mother and daughter. Both women sat unmoving, their bodies tense, their faces pale and without expression.

It was then that George Dethenos lost his last hold on reason!

With a single, savage roar he sprang between the soldiers and the women of his house, his charging body brushing the former aside. And then his great fist lashed out to catch one of the aides full on the jaw. The force of the blow lifted the man completely from his feet and slammed him half across the parlor and into the wall with an impact that shook the house.

The remaining soldier was struggling to free his gun from its holster as the maddened farmer turned on him. And Leutnant Ludwig Scholle, a cold smile touching the corners of his thin lips, had drawn his own Luger and was carefully drawing a bead on the Greek.

Then several things happened almost simultaneously. Dethenos caught the German soldier by the gun arm with one hand and with one terrible blow blasted him completely through the closed window and into the yard outside; and Margaret Dethenos sprang between her husband and Scholle as the latter fired.

Hard on the heels of the vicious *crack* of the Luger came a second report and Leutnant Ludwig Scholle suddenly clutched his left shoulder, spun in a half circle and toppled to the floor. Thirteen year old John Dethenos, a dazed expression on his boyish face, a smoking Luger in his hand, stood star-

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ing at the motionless body of his mother on the floor and that of his father kneeling beside her.

IN THE brief moment of silence that followed, the startled shouts of the Germans outside came clearly through the broken window.

"Father," the boy said hoarsely, "is it bad? She is not . . ."

The man lifted his head to the tortured faces of his two children.

"She is dead." His voice broke a little on the last word, his only indication of emotion.

The sharp sound of the kitchen door banging open galvanized him into action. Plucking the unconscious German's gun from the limp fingers of his son, he urged the boy and the girl toward the front door.

"Hurry!" he whispered. "Get to the Nazis' horses while they are unguarded!"

As the three of them reached the front door, a round-faced German appeared in the kitchen doorway, closely followed by a number of his companions.

"Stop where you are!" he shouted, in execrable Greek, lifting the gun in his hand.

With deceptive deliberateness, George Dethenos turned and shot him through the head. The falling body tripped up two of the others pressing at his heels, and before the confusion was ended, the three fugitives had gained the yard and were bearing down upon the group of horses tethered at the fence.

"*Schiessen!*" came an insane bellow from the porch. "*Tot schiessen!*"

And shoot to kill, they did! The sharp crackle of gun fire awoke a hundred echoes among the hills. Bullets whined past them, and one of the horses screamed like a woman and fell, its threshing legs spreading terror among the rest.

With a savage jerk, the farmer freed one of the steeds and swung John into the high-pommeled saddle and Myra behind him. As the boy's hands caught up the reins, Dethenos delivered a stinging slap against the animal's flank that sent it plunging along the road away from the house.

Myra, her arms about the waist of her brother, turned her head to learn if her father was following on another horse. She was in time to see him vault into a saddle, wrench around the head of his mount and dig his heels into its sides. As the horse broke into a startled gallop, she saw the slender figure of Leutnant Ludwig Scholle, standing in the yard, raise his pistol and level it at her father.

"Father!" she screamed. "Look out! He's going to sho—"

The sharp report of exploding powder cut off her words. George Dethenos stiffened in the saddle, the lines fell from his nerveless fingers and he toppled headlong into the dust of the road.

Fear and horror clutched at Myra's heart. "Turn back, John!" she shouted in her brother's ear. "Father's been hurt!"

Instantly the boy pulled back on the reins with all his strength. But his mount, a coal-black stallion with the lines of a thoroughbred, was completely out of control. The sounds of gunfire, angry voices and running feet had caused it to bolt, and only complete exhaustion would stop those flying hoofs.

The trail underfoot led downward at a fairly sharp degree, increasing the riders' peril inasmuch as their mount might stumble and throw them. Less than a kilometer behind them came several of the Germans, spurring their horses in a frantic effort to overtake the youth and his sister.

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A FEW minutes later Myra chanced a quick look over her shoulder and saw, amidst the clouds of dust, the pursuers only three of four hundred yards away. In the brief instant that she observed them, she saw the soldier on the leading horse raise his pistol and fire at them.

She put her mouth close to the boy's ear. "They're after us, John, and getting closer. What can we do?"

John turned his head a bit that she might hear his reply. "There's a narrow side trail leading off this road, just around that curve we're coming to. I'll try to turn into it. The Nazis may go on by."

The road bent sharply, now, to skirt the base of a steep incline. Hardly had they made the turn and disappeared from view of their pursuers than John was tugging at the left rein with all his strength.

The horse stumbled breathtakingly, reared high, almost unseating its riders, and plunged toward the wall of trees and bushes lining the trail. Just as it appeared that both passengers would be swept from their mount by low-hanging branches, John Dethenos jerked once more on the left rein.

And almost magically the way was open once more, and the thoroughbred was thundering along a narrow path that wound steeply downward to the base of the hill.

Because of the abrupt incline, the horse was soon forced to make progress by sliding with forelegs stiffened; so that by the time the floor of the tiny valley was reached, John was able to gain control of the animal.

He reined up, and for the better part of a quarter hour they remained there, hidden from above by thick fringe of trees bordering the ravine.

Myra was trembling, partially from relief at having eluded the pursuing Germans but mostly from shock at the horrible deaths of her parents. John Dethenos turned in the saddle and put his arms about her, and for a little while both gave way to tears.

The movements of the horse as it grazed at the long grass brought them back to the present. John released the girl and slid to the ground, then helped her down beside him.

"What are we to do, John?" she asked brokenly. "We can't go back home; the Nazis would kill us. And we can't just stay here in the hills."

Her brother nodded. Suddenly he seemed older, matured, with lines in his face and grimness to the set of his jaw that had not been there an hour before.

"We will go to the house of Resan Soubosko," he said. "He will keep you hidden there until things quiet down."

Myra shook her head.

"No, John. That would not do. You wounded the German officer. He will not rest until he finds you and kills you. To seek refuge with Resan Soubosko would endanger him and his family. We cannot do that, John."

UNWAVERING determination shone in the boy's eyes.

"That is true," he said. "About this officer, Scholle, hunting me down, I mean. So I will go and kill him first!"

She caught his arm with convulsive fingers. "Please! That's madness. You're just a boy, John. You wouldn't stand a chance."

"Anyway," he said, in an obvious attempt to change the subject, "we've got to find some place for you to stay. Too bad you're not a boy; then I'd know just the place."

"What's my being a girl got to do with it?" Myra demanded.

"A girl couldn't stay out in the open."

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"In the open? You mean—outdoors?"

"Well, not exactly," John said. "There's a cave at the opposite end of this little valley. The opening is hardly wide enough to squeeze through, but it widens out inside. It's nice and dry—high enough up from the floor of the valley so that no water can get in—and runs way back into the hill."

Myra's brown eyes were thoughtful. "It mightn't be so bad, at that. Better than sleeping under the stars. . . . If only we had supplies of some kind."

"I might wait until nightfall, then slip down to the Soubosko's," John suggested. "They'd be glad to let us have food and blankets and things."

Myra nodded her lovely head decisively.

"We'll do it, John. Let's go to the cave now and stay there until dark."

They remounted, and John urged the horse through the trees toward the opposite end of the narrow ravine.

It required only a few minutes to reach the broad, almost sheer cliff that formed the eastern boundary of the hollow. Heavy vines covered the rock wall with a curtain of green.

Myra's gaze went over the towering expanse of shaggy granite, and her heart sank a little at the thought of spending nights in such wild, primitive surroundings. As her brother helped her down, she said:

"It seems so—so untamed. Are you sure it's safe here?"

John nodded with the supreme confidence of the very young. "Of course it's safe. First place, no one can see any sign of the cave's entrance. Right now, we're not more than ten feet away from it and I'll bet you can't see it. Can you?"

His sister peered at the tangle of greenery for a long moment, then shook her head in surrender.

"No, I can't. I suppose it's behind all those vines, somewhere."

In reply, John went directly to the foot of the cliff a bit to the left of where they had been standing. Seizing several of the trailing vines, he pulled them to one side, revealing a slit-like break in the rock some five or six feet above the valley floor.

"Well!" the girl gasped. "I'd have never seen it!"

John laughed delightedly. "Nor will anyone else—especially the Nazis if they come hunting for us. I'll bet I'm the only one who knows about this cave.

"Come, Myra; I'll help you to get up to it. I want you to see our new home!"

The girl joined him at the foot of the wall. "How will we be able to see, once we're inside?" she asked, as he leaned his back to the wall and extended his cupped hands to serve as a step.

"There's a stack of resin-wood sticks piled just inside," the boy explained. "And I've flint and steel to light them."

Satisfied, Myra placed her foot in the palms of his hands, and John's muscles tensed for the effort of lifting her to the cave's edge.

And at that instant, the foliage behind her parted silently and the green-clad figure of a German soldier brought his rifle to his shoulder, took careful aim at John Dethenos' chest and tightened his finger against the trigger!

## CHAPTER II

THE thin, piping note of the train whistle came faintly to the ears of the group of uniformed men in the luxuriously appointed club car. A moment later the clicking wheels took on a hollow sound, denoting that they were crossing a bridge.

One of the men, a short, thick-set individual with a dark, impassive face,

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glanced at the dial of his wrist-watch, then at the brooding, almost sullen countenance of him who sat slumped wearily in a chair a few feet away from his companions.

"It is midnight, *mein Fuehrer.* Shall I have your berth made up?"

Adolf Hitler withdrew from his gloomy reverie and turned dark, sunken eyes on the speaker. Against the startling pallor of his deeply lined face, the trade marks of limp forelock and Chaplin mustache stood out starkly.

"I have no desire to sleep, my dear Himmler," he said quietly. "My visit to Greece is of such importance that I cannot close my eyes until it is completed."

"As your Excellency wishes," Himmler murmured. He would have given a great deal for a tall drink and a cigarette; but the Fuehrer frowned on such vices and they would have to wait. Of course there were bottles of fruit juices in the club car refrigerator, but such pap was not for the head of the Gestapo.

Hitler fingered the Iron Cross on the breast of his uniform—its sole decoration. He said:

"By the time midnight comes again, Himmler, I may have the answer to Germany's fate! The very thought awes me."

An immense barrel of a man in a resplendent, be-medalled uniform, turned his leonine head to say:

"Germany's fate, her hopes, her future, her destiny—all rest with you, my Leader."

Heinrich Himmler shot a thinly veiled glance of hatred at the speaker. Those were almost the exact words he, himself, had been on the point of uttering. Trust Goering, the fat fool, to butter the Fuehrer with oily flattery!

Hitler showed his pleasure by a deprecatory wave of his hand.

"It is kind of you to say that, Hermann," he murmured. "And for that reason, particularly, I must be certain that my decisions are uniformly correct. That is why I have made no move without first consulting the stars themselves."

The gloom came back into his expression as he said that. "The weakness of astrology lies not with the message of the stars, but in the interpretation given by the astrologers. Since the Russian campaign, I have been reluctant to heed the counsel of such."

Goering said thoughtfully, "And it is your opinion, Excellency, that the Delphinian oracle will truthfully answer your queries?"

The Austrian's face was shining now—an example of the swiftness with which his moods often changed.

"Such is my hope," he said. "True, it has been many ages since the voice of the oracle was last heard; but I believe that is because no truly great leader has consulted it in all that time.

"Understand, *mein Herrn,* that I am prepared for a disappointment. The oracle may be as much a myth as Apollo who founded it. But I believe it to be worth trying."

He rose abruptly. "Please see that my berth is prepared, Himmler; I believe I shall retire, after all. There may be considerable climbing of hills for us before we reach the site of ancient Phocis. But first let us drink to the success of my mission."

AT A gesture from Himmler, a white-coated steward removed a large bottle of fruit juice from the car's refrigerator, placed it on a large tray with several glasses, and came forward.

As a signal honor, Hitler, himself, poured the beverage and handed 'round the glasses. The three Nazi leaders clinked the glass rims lightly together,

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then tossed off the contents.

"*Guten Abend, Herrn,*" said Hitler, smiling.

Three right arms shot up in the Nazi salute.

"Heil Hitler!"

He turned toward the door leading into the next car, the four members of his personal guard, who had remained stiffly at attention during the entire evening, taking their positions about him. With Heinrich Himmler leading the way, they left the club car, leaving the bulky-bodied Goering alone with the steward.

When the door had closed behind the others, Goering sank into one of the leather chairs and sighed gustily.

"Krause."

"*Ja,* Excellency?" replied the white-coated attendant.

"Kümmel."

"At once, Herr *Reichs Feldmarshal.*"

For the better part of half an hour the Field Marshal sat sipping his liqueur, rolling the oily liquid about his tongue to savor the tang of caraway. Sometimes, he told himself heavily, it was very difficult humoring the whims of a madman. And lately, since the fall of Tunisia and the loss of Crete, that madness had become more evident. And with the invasion of Europe itself perhaps only hours away, with the hordes of Stalin's troops already across the former Russo-Polish border, Germany's supreme commander was off on a wild-goose chase!

Himmler's entrance roused him from his thoughts, and he watched the Gestapo head sit himself and accept a decanter of brandy and a glass from Krause.

Himmler sampled the liquor, put down the glass and withdrew his cigarette case, which he snapped open and extended to the Field Marshal.

Goering took an enormous draught of the smoke and let it out almost with reluctance. "Our Fuehrer has retired?" he asked, to break the silence.

Himmler reached again for his brandy glass. "Yes," he said. "He has had a tiring day. A remarkable man, Herr Goering."

"Precisely, my dear Himmler," said the fat man. "That very word was in my mind when you spoke."

* * *

UNDER the impetus of John's strong young muscles, Myra managed to scramble over the lip of the cave's narrow entrance. Bracing herself, she extended a hand and drew him up beside her.

A patch of sunlight dappled the dry, level floor immediately inside the opening. Beyond that, heavy gloom deepened into impenetrable darkness.

The girl peered nervously about her. "How far back does the cave go?" she asked, unconsciously whispering.

"I don't know," John admitted, stooping to take up a short, thick bit of trimmed branch. "About a hundred feet back there's a big break in the floor that runs from both side walls. It's all of fifteen feet across and goes way down into the ground. I dropped a burning branch into it one time and I never did see it reach bottom."

Myra shivered. "Then I'm not going one step farther into this cave!"

John waited until he had succeeded in setting fire to one end of the branch before replying to her declaration. Then he said:

"Stop acting like a girl! There's nothing to be afraid of, I tell you. Just don't go too far back without light, that's all. And quit whispering, will you? It only makes you all the more edgy!"

He lighted a second branch from the first, handed it to her and said:

"Come on. I want you to see what

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the place is like. Then you won't be so afraid while I'm away."

"John!" The girl caught him by the arm in sudden panic, her brown eyes wide. "You're not going to leave me here alone?"

He faced her then, his expression grim and determined.

"I've got to, Myra. We need blankets and food and clothing. I'm going down to the Soubosko's to get those things. And Resan must be told about—about Father and Mother. We know that Mother is dead—Father too, I suppose. Resan will bury them, Myra."

She began to cry again, her body trembling with sobs. "Oh God, John, we're all alone. They're both gone; we'll never see them again. What shall we do?"

"Do?" The boy snarled the word. "I'll tell you what we're going to do, Myra. We're going to make the Nazis pay—pay in blood and pain and death! The gods of Old Greece spoke through the mouths of our mother's ancestors, Myra; and those same gods will give us strength and cunning to avenge our dead!"

His sudden head-shake was almost a shudder. "Come; we're wasting time. I want you to see the rest of this cave."

THE wavering radiance from the torches revealed the cavern to be perhaps thirty feet from side to side and about half that distance to the arched ceiling. The walls and floor were of smooth black rock, giving Myra the impression that this was a man-made cave rather than one formed by natural means.

After slowly progressing a hundred feet or so, they caught sight of the fissure John had mentioned. Myra stopped fully a dozen feet away from the edge, but her brother inched his way almost to its brink, then stretched out on the floor and peered down.

"Want to look at it, Myra?" he called back to her after a moment. "Looks as though it goes straight down for a hundred kilometers!"

"No!" She backed still farther away, shivering. "Certainly not! And I wish you'd come away from there."

"Oh, all right." He retreated several feet on hands and knees, then rose and accompanied her back to the cave entrance. There he extinguished his torch and gave Myra his flint and steel.

"I'm going now," he told her. "I'll get supplies from Resan Soubosko and be back before very long. I may have to wait until after nightfall in case the Nazis are about, so don't let being alone in the dark frighten you. Each of these branches will give you light for at least an hour and there are plenty of them."

Myra smiled bravely and patted his arm. "Don't worry about me, John. You've got enough to do without that. I'll be all right."

"Of course you will! I'm going to ride the German's horse part of the way to the Soubosko's then turn him loose. We don't really need it, and if we kept it tied up near the cave, somebody might see it and discover our hiding place.

"Stay in the cave, Myra, and don't worry or be afraid. I'm going now. Goodbye."

He squeezed her arm affectionately, lowered himself over the edge of the opening and dropped to the ground. Myra watched him release the tethered animal, vault lightly into the saddle and, with a wave of his hand to her, disappear among the trees. Just before he was lost from view, however, she saw the horse shy abruptly, then steady under John's practiced hand. Sighing, she turned and went back into the cave, allowing the curtain of vines to drop across the entrance.

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For almost five minutes there was no sign of live in the little glade bordering the cliff's edge. Then the wall of bushes parted and John Dethenos reappeared, this time on foot. After a quick glance to assure himself that the heavy growth of vines was covering the mouth of the cave, he knelt and pushed aside the long grasses partially covering the lifeless body of a German soldier.

The skin was still warm to the touch, denoting that death was recent, but there was no visible sign of a wound. The dead face was twisted into a mask of horror and fear so intense that the boy felt his scalp prickle with awe.

At last he withdrew the rifle from stiffening fingers, covered the body with grass and leaves, and went back to where he had left the horse.

And once more the clearing was empty of life.

WHEN Myra Dethenos turned back into the cave after her brother had gone, she was conscious only of being very tired. The reaction to the grueling experiences of that afternoon had set in, leaving her numbed and limp. Hardly aware of what she was doing, she sank into a sitting position on the stone floor, leaned her back against the wall and went instantly to sleep.

She awakened in darkness—a darkness so absolute that it was as though she had been stricken blind while asleep. Memories of the past hours' events flooded into her mind almost at once; and, wincing under the agony of cramped muscles, she staggered to her feet and felt her way to the curtain of foliage cloaking the cave's entrance.

The star-studded loveliness of the night skies met her gaze. To her left loomed the wall-like under-cliffs of Mount Parnassus—the cliffs her mother had called the Phaedriades, or shining rocks. And on the right, blunt-peaked Mount Cirphis stood as a lonely sentinel.

For a little while she stood there, looking out over the small ravine, its trees ghostly under the light of the stars. She wondered where John was by this time; and the wonder switched quickly to worry. Perhaps the Nazis had captured him by now and were torturing him to force a disclosure of her hiding-place!

As a means of banishing the thought, she went to the pile of resinous branches, selected one and set it to burning. A sprig of laurel leaves, caught among the sticks, attracted her eye and she put two of them in her mouth to chew, as she had seen her mother do many times.

With the primitive torch lighting her way, she moved restlessly about the tomb-like cave. As though drawn by some subtle but compelling force, she found herself approaching the bottomless chasm bisecting the smooth flooring.

Under the spell of an unexplicable fascination, she knelt at the very brink of the rift, bracing herself by holding to a small ledge protruding from the side wall.

As she bent forward slightly to peer into the depths, she felt the stone under her hand give slightly with a muffled *click,* followed by a barely audible whirring sound.

*And under her, the stone flooring began to move!*

Myra cried out with fear and surprise and threw herself back from the edge of the abyss. For fully fifteen seconds the flat surface under her huddled form continued to slide smoothly forward; then it stopped abruptly and the faint whirring ceased.

Her heart pounding wildly, Myra waited a full minute before rising to her feet. That which met her eyes

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brought an involuntary gasp of astonishment.

*The crevice was now bridged by a stone slab!*

Fear gave way reluctantly before a burning curiosity. Ahead of her, cloaked by heavy shadows, was a subterranean territory that possibly no human foot had touched since the days of those who had fashioned this wonderful bridge.

She went back to the cave entrance, gathered up several of the resinous branches and set out to explore the unknown depths of this strange cavern.

AN HOUR later she was still forging steadily ahead. Shortly after crossing the abyss, the rock underfoot had taken a slightly downhill slant, and by now she must be well below the level of the cave's entrance.

Weariness forced her to halt, finally, and she sat down and rested her back against the wall. The silence here was so absolute that it seemed almost a tangible substance. For the first time she began to wonder if her undertaking had been the wise thing to do. Possibly John had returned from the Soubosko's by now and he would be worried at not finding her waiting for him. She would rest here for a few minutes, then start back. . . .

Myra awoke with a start. The torch she had propped against the wall was now a tiny heap of cold ashes, indicating that she had slept for at least an hour. With nervous haste she kindled another, and the familiar vista of smooth-rock ceiling, walls and floor appeared once more.

Reason prompted the girl to turn back the way she had come. But something deep within her clamored for an answer to where the long tunnel led. She was both ravenous and thirsty, but even those desires were not compelling enough to overcome the urge of curiosity.

She decided to continue onward for another half hour; then if the end was not yet in sight, she would turn around and go back.

Not long afterward, she heard the faint murmur of running water and she came upon a narrow, shallow underground stream flowing at right angles across her path to disappear into an opening where floor and wall formed a juncture.

The laurel leaves had left a brackish taste in her mouth, and she drank deeply of the cold, clear water. Greatly refreshed, she rose and went on with renewed strength.

And then, suddenly, the narrow confines of the tunnel-like cave were gone and Myra Dethenos was standing at the threshold of an immense, circular chamber carved from solid rock. Over her, hundreds of feet up, stretched the majestic reaches of a vaulted ceiling. Small openings there admitted daylight to fill the enormous room with a faint, ghostly radiance.

It was the presence of that light that gave Myra her greatest shock. "Good Heavens," she murmured, aloud, "I must have slept longer than I realized."

It was a room majestic with the antiquity of long-dead and forgotten centuries. Set in the wall were tremendous blocks of gleaming white marble, carved with figures in bas-relief of the ancient gods and goddesses. Here was Hermes, winged messenger; Apollo, handsome of face and figure; Poseidon, god of the sea, heavy-bearded and stern of expression, trident raised in a lordly gesture. And there stood Perseus, slayer of the Gorgon Medusa and rescuer of Andromeda; and Hercules, and Persephone, and many others. Myra knew them all; for Margaret Dethenos had told their stories over

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and over again while her daughter was a little girl, and later the mother had taken her to see the statues of the gods —statues formed by hands gone to dust hundreds of centuries ago.

AS SHE stood there, peering at the carvings in the half-light, a strange lassitude began to wash over her mind and the figures of the gods seemed to move and swell before her eyes. Slowly the light became stronger and the few contents of the room grew more distinct.

And then a great voice spoke out, clear and resonant as a crystal bell, saying:

*"O Pythia, daughter of Pythia whose mother was Pythia, heed my words!"*

As though held in some trance-like state, as though some strange inner-self whose presence she had never suspected was taking possession of her body's every cell, Myra's head sank humbly to her chest and she heard her own reply:

"Speak, mighty Apollo. I, the virgin Pythia, await your command."

Again, the great voice filled the vast room:

*"You have tasted of the leaves of laurel?"*

"I have, O Apollo."

*"You have drunk of the waters of Kassotis?"*

"I have, O Apollo."

*"Come forward, then, and take your place on the Tripod."*

With slow, measured stride, Myra crossed the great hall. Her own mind and will seemed to have been driven to some remote corner of her brain to make way for some new Presence that, oddly, was also Myra.

Across the room, near the wall and facing it, stood a low three-legged stool with a circular seat. Lying thereon, covered with the dust of forgotten centuries, was a withered branch of laurel. Without prompting, Myra tenderly lifted the branch, pressed it to her lips, her brow and her breasts, then placed it carefully beneath the stool. Now she sank down on the seat and drew her legs beneath her.

And as she sat there, arms folded across her breasts and head bowed, a tenuous green vapor drifted up from a long, thin fissure in the floor between the tripod and the wall. Gradually it thickened, swirling about the girl on the stool and filling her nostrils with its acrid fumes.

In the tiny niche of her own mind to which she had been driven, Myra Dethenos felt the last vestige of consciousness slipping from her. One last, supreme effort she made to regain control of her will; then darkness closed in and she knew no more.

## CHAPTER III

WITH the first glow of dawn in the east, three long, black limousines, in single file, pulled into the curb before Dadion's leading—and only!—hotel. The middle car contained only the driver; the others were loaded with uniformed German soldiers, all heavily armed.

Three men came from the hotel entrance and crossed the strip of pavement to the side of the empty car. There they were met by an officer whose left arm hung in a black sling depending from his neck. He clicked his heels briskly and flung up his right arm in the Nazi salute.

"Leutnant Scholle, Excellencies," he said nervously. "I have been appointed as guide for your journey."

Both Heinrich Himmler and the resplendent Goering acknowledged the introduction with curt, impersonal reserve; but the Fuehrer had gained the

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almost fanatical loyalty of troops and under-officers by knowing how and when to unbend.

"Thank you, Herr Leutnant," he said warmly, extending his hand to the visibly embarrassed lieutenant. "You have been told of our destination?"

"Yes, *mein* Fuehrer."

"Good. Then let us get started."

The three German leaders entered the rear seat of the limousine. Scholle closed the door behind them, then slid into the front next to the driver. The engines of the three cars thundered to life and the cavalcade got under way.

The broad highway wound among the hills, skirting towering cliffs and the borders of green valleys. The sky was clear and very blue, and the air was fresh and cool.

Goering and Himmler sat stiff and preoccupied; but, between them, Hitler had turned loquacious.

"How far must we travel, Leutnant Scholle?" he asked.

"Approximately one hundred kilometers, Excellency."

"I am told the temple of Apollo has been restored to its original condition. Have you had occasion, Leutnant, to visit it?"

"Once, Excellency. An imposing and impressive sight."

"Good. One thing I meant to ask you about: Have arrangements been made for an interpretation of any message the oracle may give me?"

It never entered Ludwig Scholle's head to doubt that the oracle of Delphi would reply to the Fuehrer's questions.

"Such arrangements have been made, Excellency," he said. "General von Lutze has instructed Professor Mueller, one of our own countrymen, to meet us there. The professor has lived in Greece for many years, and is recognized as one of the world's leading authorities on the Delphinian oracle."

SLIGHTLY more than an hour later, the three cars pulled off the main highway and followed a narrow, paved road that hugged the under-cliffs of Mount Parnassus. To the south, nestling at the bottom of a ragged, picturesque glen, they could see the white houses of a village. The ruins of ancient temples were also discernible, giving a startling contrast between modern Greece and the days of its glory.

"What town is that, Leutnant?" asked Hitler.

"Delphi, *mein* Fuehrer. We are nearly at the site of the oracle."

"But is not the temple in Delphi itself?"

"The temple of Apollo is situated in the village. The temple of the oracle lies flush against the side of Mount Parnassus."

The car ahead turned off onto a broad, level shelf of ground seemingly dug out of the side of the mountain, and came to a halt. The car containing the German leaders, and the one at the rear, repeated the maneuver and all passengers stepped out.

A rather small edifice of white stone had been erected here, its rear wall tight against a towering stone cliff. Tremendous Doric columns flanked both sides of the entrance, and rich carvings, both in high- and bas-relief covered the cornices.

An elderly, stoop-shouldered man in civilian clothes came forward to meet them.

"Heil Hitler!" he cried, flinging up his frail right arm. "This is a great moment in my life, Excellency. In fact, it is *the* great moment.

"Pardon me. In my pleasure I neglected to introduce myself." He clicked his heels and bowed creakingly. "Mueller, Paul. This is an honor, *mein* Fuehrer, that I dreamed of but never expected to realize. To think that I, a

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humble savant, should be accorded—"

A shadow of annoyance came into Hitler's face; and Goering, quick to detect the sign, interrupted the garrulous tongue.

"His Excellency is here on a matter of the utmost importance," he said haughtily. "May I suggest, Herr Professor, that we get on with it?"

"Of course! Certainly! Let us go into the temple. You must excuse my delight at meeting such distinguished . . ."

He led them across the open ground and through the portals of the white building, his tongue wagging constantly.

The interior of the temple was almost disappointingly lacking in the majesty and mysticism the visitors had unconsciously expected. Except for several statues of Apollo and one of Poseidon, and several huge urns, all of which were modern reproductions, the temple was bare.

Mueller took them directly to the rear of the edifice. It was instantly apparent that the wall at that point was nothing more than the virgin rock of the cliff itself. A circular opening, no larger than the circumference of a man's arm, was visible in the stone at a level slightly above their eyes.

"From that orifice," Professor Mueller said in hushed tones, "will come the voice of Pythia, giving counsel or foretelling the future. You will please understand, Excellency, that the oracle has been silent for many ages. Legend has it that, with the passing of Greece's power, her gods withdrew from contact with mortals. But when one who is more god than mortal calls upon the oracle to speak, it may very well obey."

ADOLF HITLER was plainly at a loss as to what was expected of him.

"What procedure is used in making queries?" he asked uneasily.

"Inform me of what you wish to know, *mein* Fuehrer. I, in turn, will repeat your questions into the opening."

Hitler wet his lips and thought for a moment. He was shaking a little from nervous tension. Finally he said:

"Ask of the oracle where the Allied armies will next attack."

"At once, Excellency."

Mueller turned to face the opening, and began to speak loudly and rhythmically in the tongue of the ancient Greeks.

He finished and stepped back to join the others. And a deep silence filled the temple. When several minutes had passed without a single sound to relieve the quiet, Mueller said:

"It appears there will be no answer, Excellency. Perhaps the question was unwelcome to the oracle."

Privately, Professor Mueller had expected no answer. As a scientist he knew all this was meaningless and to no purpose. But one did not disagree with Herr Hitler; one only followed orders and hoped for the best.

Hitler fingered his chin uncertainly. "If you were to ask when we shall win the war . . .?"

Professor Mueller repeated the question in the same measured cadence as the first.

And once again, complete silence was the only response.

Goering shifted uneasily. He felt like a fool standing there, listening to an old imbecile sing words into a hole.

"I fear your time is being wasted, my Leader," he said. "Do you wish to return to the car?"

Hitler sighed. "I suspect you are right, Hermann. I have put too much faith in what obviously is no more than a myth. Let us go back."

"Perhaps if your Excellency would try once more," suggested Mueller. He was enjoying this rubbing of elbows

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with Germany's great and was reluctant to have it end. "The oracle may have considered your first two questions too exacting for an answer."

The Fuehrer hesitated, unwilling to prolong what had turned into a farce.

"Very well," he agreed finally. "Ask the oracle how long National Socialism and Germany shall rule the world."

The silence that followed Mueller's repetition of the question was suddenly electric. Every man within the temple was simultaneously positive that this last query would not go unanswered.

Nor were they mistaken.

FROM the mouth of the circular opening came a rustling sound, as of a high wind through many leaves. As it swelled in volume, the Germans heard what seemed a woman's voice mingled with the crackling noise—a voice speaking in an unfamiliar tongue.

And then the voice ceased, the rustling sound faded into silence; and Professor Mueller, his wrinkled face reflecting an almost laughable mixture of ecstasy and bewilderment, said:

"I cannot believe it! Yes, I heard it; with these ears I heard it. But I do not believe. It must have been some phenomenon of mass suggestion perhaps; or it could be—"

Himmler grasped his stooped shoulder roughly and shook him.

"Stop babbling, you withered bag of bones! What was the meaning of those words?"

"Ah yes—the words. They were of a language centuries old when Rome was founded. This has been an experience, Excellencies, that is absolutely unique in the annals of Science. I shall do a monograph based—"

With a vicious swing of his right hand, Himmler cuffed the old man across the lips.

"Will you talk sense? Or must I beat the answer out of you?"

Professor Mueller raised a shaking hand to his hurt mouth and the sheen of elation died in his eyes.

"Of course," he said meekly. "I can give you no more than a translation, thereby losing the majestic ring of the actual words."

"Never mind the 'majestic ring' part of it," growled Goering impatiently. Give it as best you can."

"Certainly. Here, then, are the words spoken to Adolf Hitler by the Delphinian Oracle":

*The Crooked Cross of infamy*
*Holds mankind helpless in its sway.*
*There is no freedom from its blight*
*Until the very stars of night*
*Shine clearly 'gainst the blue of day.*

The German leaders stared at one another wonderingly. Hitler passed an unsteady hand across his slackened jaw.

"But what does it mean?" he demanded. "There is no sense to it."

" 'No sense'?" shouted Mueller, forgetting completely the rank of his audience. "The meaning is perfectly clear. The crooked cross is, of course, the swastika. It—National Socialism—rules mankind. And no power can prevail against it until the stars can be seen while the sun is shining. And that, naturally, is completely impossible!

"Gentlemen; *mein* Fuehrer. The oracle has spoken! Germany's power, as established by Adolf Hitler, shall rule the world—forever!"

* * *

"MYRA! Wake up, Myra! What's the matter with you?"

From the depths of a gray, swirling fog, Myra Dethenos struggled back to consciousness. A hand was shaking her by one shoulder, while a voice called her name in a blending of concern and impatience.

She opened her eyes; and John Dethenos sat back and let go a heartfelt sigh of relief.

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"You certainly sleep when you put your mind to it! I've been trying to wake you for fifteen minutes!"

Dazedly, Myra pulled herself into a sitting position and looked about. Sunlight filtered through a curtain of vines to light the now familiar cave.

"How did I get back?" she asked weakly.

John Dethenos stared at her with puzzled eyes.

"Get back from where? You didn't leave the cave, did you?"

Whereupon, Myra told him the whole story: of the stone slab bridging the chasm, and the hour she had spent following the tunnel; of the huge room beneath the mountain, and the Voice and the Tripod and the vapor rising from a crack in the floor.

When she was finished, her brother shook his head and grinned.

"You've been dreaming, Myra. And while you've been lying here having those dreams, wonderful things have been happening!"

But Myra wasn't listening. She said, "I was not dreaming, John Dethenos!" She got to her feet. "Come back to the chasm and I'll show you the stone bridge!"

Her brother rose and followed her, his expression plainly indicating that he was doing so only to humor her. And when they stood near the brink, he watched her jaw drop with amazement, and he grinned once more.

*The bottomless rift stretched from wall to wall, unbridged!*

"Satisfied?" John asked triumphantly.

She scorned to reply; instead she knelt by the wall, sought out—and found— the small ledge there, and pressed down upon it.

Nothing happened. No movement, no muffled *click*—nothing.

John took the bewildered girl by the arm and led her back to the cave's entrance.

He said quietly, "Now forget this dream of yours and stand here for a minute and listen. When you tell me what you hear, I'll tell you the most wonderful news possible."

Obediently she bent her head in a listening attitude and for several moments there was complete silence in the cave.

Faintly, as though from a great distance, she heard what seemed to be a sporadic thumping. Then, rising above that sound, came a faint buzzing which died out almost as it began.

"I *do* hear something," she agreed slowly. "But just what it is, I can't make—"

The return of the buzzing noise, louder this time, interrupted her—a buzzing that suddenly became a roaring whine.

"Planes!" they shouted together, and scrambled for the entrance.

THOUSANDS of feet above the tiny valley two fighters twisted and looped and dived. And from the edges of their wings came lances of flame, and the stutter of guns mingled with the thunder of engines.

John's sharp eyes caught the insignias of the two war birds. "A Messerschmitt!" he cried, "and a fighting plane of our allies!"

He caught her arm suddenly and shouted hysterically: "Myra! Myra! It is from America! The Yankees have come to free Greece!"

He turned to her, eyes shining. "This is what I wanted to tell you, Myra. At noon today, two hours ago, the Allies landed soldiers all along the northern shore of the Gulf of Korinthos. Resan Soubosko, Alexis Prythanix and the others set time bombs last night in the big German arsenals and installa-

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tions at Galaxeiaron and Navpaktos and Patrai. Those bombs went off just as the first wave of landing barges showed up off the coast. While the Nazis and the Italians were running around without knowing which way to turn, the planes came over in waves to bomb them.

"Oh, the Allies played it right, Myra! By landing along the Gulf, they've bypassed all the Fascist fortifications along the southern shores of Peloponnesus; and if they manage to hold their gains and extend them to the Evrippou Channel on the east—why, the Axis will have to withdraw from Greece!"

The drone of the dueling planes overhead increased in volume suddenly, and the boy and the girl turned their faces to the skies to watch them. They were in time to see the German ship receive a burst of bullets in its engines, and a moment later it broke into flames and nosed over into a screaming dive, to crash among the low-lying hills to the west.

The American plane was climbing now. John and Myra watched it gain altitude, thrilled and inspired by its graceful lines.

Abruptly, the faint hum of the plane's motors ceased, then roared to life again. A trail of black smoke streamed from its tail—a trail that grew thicker and blacker with each passing second.

The pilot, a tiny figure to the now horrified pair below, twisted the plane over on its back and plummeted from the open cockpit. An instant later a white mushroom of silk sprang into full bloom above him.

They could see the man tugging desperately at the lines of his 'chute as he floated groundward. John was the first to guess his purpose.

"He's trying to hit the level ground next to our ravine!" he cried. "Come on, Myra; maybe we can help him!"

BY THE time they had gained the upper edge of the valley, the parachute and its passenger had come to earth only a few hundred yards away. Myra and John raced hand in hand across the field toward him.

He was a brown-skinned, black-haired young man, with good features and a tall, well-knit figure, bulky in flying clothes. He was swearing bitterly and fluently as he gathered together the folds of his parachute, but since the words were in English the boy and his sister did not understand them.

He said, in excellent Greek, "Greetings, citizens! Sorry to drop in on you this way, but that damned kraut-head got lucky at the last minute. How do I get back to my side of the fence?"

They stared at him in wonder. "Are you not an American?" John asked disappointedly.

The flier straightened proudly. "Of course, I am! Didn't you see the markings on my plane? Don't I *look* like an American?"

"But you speak our language," Myra said.

"Oh, that." The airman grinned, his white, even teeth flashing in his tanned face. "I'm Nick Vaskos and I was born and raised in Athens. But I have lived in America for seven years. Now I am a citizen of America."

"And you have come back to free your homeland from the invader!" Myra said breathlessly. "Isn't it wonderful?"

Nick stared at her eager, lovely face and mentally whistled his appreciation. "Yeah," he said softly. "I guess you could put it that way. Say, what's your name?"

Their eyes met—and held. Something came alive within them at that instant—something new and startling and glorious for both. The world about them ceased to exist.

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"I—I am Myra Dethenos," she faltered.

"Married?"

"No."

"Betrothed?"

"No." Her checks were blazing now, but her eyes did not waver.

John, on whom all this was lost, tugged at the flier's sleeve. "I am John Dethenos; she is my sister. Are the Germans beaten yet?"

The sparkle went out of Nick Vaskos' eyes and his mouth turned grim.

"No," he told the boy soberly. "They are not beaten. And if more of our planes and boats do not arrive soon, we shall be the beaten ones!"

The pure horror in the faces of his listeners shocked him into the realization of what life under Nazi rule must be like.

"Why do they not come, then?" cried the boy wildly.

Nick shrugged. "It could be one of many reasons. To guess is useless. But I am needed where the Americans are fighting. Tell me, please, how to get to the coast."

"It is fully ten kilometers as a bird flies," John told him. "More than fifteen by road. And since there is nothing to ride, you must walk."

Nick Vaskos grinned wryly. "I'm afraid that's out. This ankle of mine won't carry me more than a kilometer or two."

For the first time they noticed that he was standing with most of his weight on his right leg.

"You're hurt!" Myra cried. "Let me see how badly."

"Oh, it is not too bad," Nick demurred. "A sprain, perhaps. "With a little rest—"

"Please," the girl persisted.

THEY managed to get his boot off without cutting it, but there were beads of sweat on his face before his foot was bare.

At sight of the swollen, purple flesh of his ankle, Myra shook her head. "It will need cold compresses and bandages at once," she told him decisively. "Where is the nearest stream, John?"

"There is a small spring at the top of that hill," her brother said, indicating one of the heights bordering the plain.

Nick said, "If you will give me a hand, I should be able to reach it. It can't be more than three or four hundred feet to the top."

Myra frowned. "That will mean a great deal of pain for you. But then you would be able to put your ankle in the cold water."

IT REQUIRED nearly an hour for the injured American to gain the hill top. And when his ankle had been bathed in the icy spring and bound with a strip of cloth from Myra's slip, he lay back with a sigh of satisfaction.

By now it was late afternoon. To the south, the cloudless sky was marred by huge columns of smoke from German installations set afire by American bombs and shells.

The American produced a pair of binoculars from a pocket of his flying garb and fell to studying the hives of activity along the section of coastline within range of his glasses. The hand-to-hand fighting was confined to the towns bordering the gulf, leaving the open ground between deserted. The tiny settlement of Trikestos, closest to them of all, seemed to be half in the hands of the Allies and half under German control.

Hundreds of planes filled the sky along the entire gulf, the majority of which appeared to be those of the Axis. Outnumbered though they were, the Allied craft were giving far more pun-

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ishment than they took; but slowly their ranks were being decimated.

Nick's face was haggard as he put down the binoculars and turned to his new friends.

"We have failed!" he mumbled bitterly. "Our men are falling back to their boats all along the line. It's those damned planes; if we only had the air strength to hold them off there'd be nothing to it." He pounded his fist against the ground in helpless fury. *"Where are those reinforcements?"*

Myra bowed her head in her hands and began to sob with all the pent-up grief that had accumulated during the past twenty-four hours.

"They mustn't fail!" she wept. "Greece and her people have suffered too long, endured too much. If the Germans win now, they may never be beaten! Have the gods of Greece forsaken her?"

From behind them came the flutter of mighty wings. Startled, they turned their heads, then leaped to their feet in bewildered amazement.

A HORSE stood there—but a horse such as no human eye had ever before beheld. Its lines were clean and slender—more so, perhaps, than those of an earthly steed. A great golden mane covered its neck, matching in hue the long graceful tail. But most remarkable of all were the mammoth, golden wings that sprang, one to each side, from behind the shoulders.

But the beast held their attention for only a startled second; it was the rider that compelled interest—and held it.

It might have been the statue of a Greek god astride his mount. Except for a cloth about his middle, he was naked. His thick crop of short, bristling blond hair set off a face that was handsome almost to the point of beauty.

As the American and his two companions stood there, stricken into voiceless wonder by this incredible vision, the horseman spoke:

"O Pythia, Voice of Gaia and Poseidon." The words rolled majestically from him, like thunder heard from a distance. "You have cried out to the ancient gods and your plea has been heard. I, Bellerophon, await your bidding."

As he spoke, a strange transformation came over Myra Dethenos. Slowly her figure drew proudly erect, a queenly hauteur touched her features. And when she spoke, her voice took on a deep note of solemnity beyond that of a woman.

"The enemies of Greece have their swords at her throat. Those who would succor her are about to perish also. Summon, then, a host of warriors, O Bellerophon, and rid Greece of this plague of the Crooked Cross!"

A leather loop about the neck of the winged horse held a great curved horn of bone; and this Bellerophon took up and set to his lips and blew a mighty blast that echoed and re-echoed among the hills. And as the piercing call faded, rank upon rank of fighting men, clad in white tunics and sandals, and bearing metal shields and short, heavy swords, seemed to spring from the earth as did the legions from the dragon teeth sown by Cadmus.*

To the incredulous eyes of Nick Varkos and John Dethenos there seemed to be thousands upon thousands of them. In perfect formation they marched across the plain and down the green slopes toward the coast.

"Shall you lead our legions, O Pythia," asked Bellerophon quietly.

The girl turned to him, eagerness in

*Cadmus was a legendary prince of Phoenicia, who slew a dragon and planted its teeth to grow an army of men. With their help he is supposed to have founded the ancient city of Thebes.—Ed.

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her brown eyes. "If only I could!"

"Then let it be so! Pegasus, my own steed, shall carry you!"

An instant later she found herself high above the ground, the powerful wings of fabled Pegasus carrying her in graceful flight over the countryside.

No longer was she Pythia, Voice of the gods. This was Myra Dethenos, daughter of Greek peasants, and she was thrilled and happy and no longer overcome with awe. With a touch of her knees she sent her mount soaring ahead of the white-tuniced hosts and high over the battle-lines of Allied and Axis armies.

A black-bodied Messerschmitt fighter came flashing toward her and opened its guns. Myra saw the thin lines of fire converging upon her, and fear came. But seemingly the gunner's shots went wild, since not even the whine of bullets was audible.

At the last moment the pilot jerked back on the controls and the plane passed only a few feet above her. Nor did it resume the attack; the last Myra saw of it was a dwindling speck streaking northward toward the Bulgarian border.

AT THE outskirts of Trikestos a dramatic scene caught her attention. A group of American infantrymen, cut off from their lines, had taken up defensive positions on the flat roof of a low building of stone. Most of them had fallen by the time Myra noticed their predicament, a lone machine-gunner being the only defender still in action.

With a guiding touch of her hand, she sent Pegasus plummeting downward. The Germans caught sight of the winged horse while it was still a hundred feet away, fired a few wild rounds into the air, then broke and ran in all directions.

A splash of color from the roof-top attracted Myra's eye. Under her touch, Pegasus dropped lightly to the roof; and the Greek girl slid from the broad back, scooped up a wooden standard and its colorful flag, and a second later was back in the air. She had a brief glimpse of the tall, lean American gunner, his tobacco-stained lips forming a limp O of surprise, before she was whisked away.

By this time the lines of sword-bearing soldiers were at the beginnings of the coastal plain bordering the gulf. Myra watched the Germans turn to face this new threat; saw them swing machine-guns and artillery into position with the muzzles pointing at this new, incredible threat.

As the first withering barrage of lethal missiles tore into the ranks of the pitifully armed phalanxes, the Stukas came hurtling down to unload their bombs. Under the combined impact, that entire section of level grassland seemed to dissolve into a Hell of flame and smoke and powdered earth.

From her place high in the air, Myra covered her eyes to shut out the horror. Not even the forces of the gods, she thought, could weather such an inferno!

After what seemed an age the thunder of exploding powder faded into silence, and Myra summoned the courage to look down once more. For a long moment she stared wide-eyed at the scene; then with a hysterical shout of incredulous relief she sent Pegasus streaking earthward.

*No single rent appeared in the solid formations of the swordsmen!*

The shock to the Nazi officers and men must have been an awful thing. Their lines began to waver and sag; but before they actually could break, the fighters of ancient Greece were upon them.

The carnage that followed was inde-

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scribable! And every casualty had one common characteristic: *he was German!*

Meanwhile, the American forces had succeeded in breaking their own awe-stricken inertia and slashed out with renewed fury at the German rear. Torn at by two foes—one that knew no fear and the other that knew not how to die! —the Nazis threw down their guns and gave up the struggle.

* * *

THE first long shadows of night were deepening across the Gulf of Korinthos. The American troops were in complete control, all hostilities had ceased and the long over-due convoy, bearing additional supplies and men, had been sighted.

Beyond the outskirts of the towns, all German dead were being interred. The Yanks in the burial parties were still shaking their heads over the appearance of those dead; and had John Dethenos been present, a question that long had secretly puzzled him would have been answered. *For no dead German body bore the slightest sign of a fresh wound!*

The only attempt at an explanation was offered by a grizzled sergeant who had seen service in the last war. "It's the Bowmen of Mons thing all over again," he said, stooping to cut an Iron Cross from a dark-green coat.*

While high on a hill some ten kilometres behind the town of Trikestos a girl in blouse and skirt and a man in a flying suit stood together looking out over the darkening valley.

She shivered a bit under the touch of cool air from the distant mountains, and Nick Vaskos tightened his arm about her shoulders. His eyes were on the large flag Myra had taken from a bullet-torn roof top. The flag's standard was thrust into the soft earth and the breeze lifted its folds, giving full display to the vivid colors.

"When this war is won, Myra," he murmured, "that shall be the flag of your country, too."

"Greece will always be my country, Nick, even though I spend the rest of my life in America."

The wind-touched flag whipped out suddenly, its white stars clear against the field of blue. And unbidden into Myra's mind came words she did not remember ever hearing before:

*—until the very stars of night*
*Shine clearly 'gainst the blue of day.*

*During the first World War, at Ypres, the British were falling back under a determined German attack when a host of phantom English bowmen in dress dating back to the Battle of Hastings, almost 900 years before, suddenly appeared in No-man's land and met the Germans with volleys of arrows. This phenomenon was rendered even more remarkable by the fact that many German dead found afterward on the field bore no signs of fatal wounds.—Ed.

## ☆ A NEW "GLIDER" BICYCLE ☆

SCIENCE always aims at reducing human effort. The latest such achievement doubles the reduction—for it reduces effort in a field of recreation. This is a new "glider" bicycle.

You can glide more than half the time while riding a bicycle built with a dual drive instead of the old style crank, report the inventors of the new development. The bicycle has a crank arm and chain on each side with the arms connected directly to the chains by special bearing links. The links pass completely around the sprockets on each stroke. The pedals are attached to sliding sleeves over levers fastened to the frame. Thus, the dual chains driven by the two levers apply continuous overlapping power, giving almost equal force the full length of each stroke.

A "gear shift" lever raises and lowers the pedals to shorten or lengthen the strokes. The bicycle's wheel base is 55 inches; its seat is only 26 inches high.

In times as these, when rationing restricts the use of heavier vehicles, a development like this, without a doubt, will receive widespread attention.

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# WHAT "TICKS" INSIDE YOU?

## By A. MORRIS

THE organs of the body are a subject much discussed. Most people know that the heart is an organ, that the liver is an organ and that the lungs are organs. The scientific definition of an organ is that an organ is a mass of tissues which performs a set task or tasks. The various tissues of the body are the muscles, nerves, connective tissue, bone and others. Organs such as the heart have several of these tissues together and all of them perform one single task. In the case of the heart this task is the pumping of blood to all parts of the body. The various organs of the body are the organs of the head, torso and the legs. The organs of the head are well known to us for the most part. They include the various organs of sense and coordination. The organs of sense are the eyes, the ears and the nose, as well as those of taste, the taste buds of the tongue and various nerve buds of the skin and the muscles. The functions of the brain are not quite so simple. The brain of the human is a very complex organ and every indication points to the fact that the mechanisms of its reactions are of such complexity that modern chemistry has no explanation of the rapidity with which the impulses travel. It is certain that the brain controls the muscular activity of the remainder of the body as well as being the coordinating center of the sensory impulses. The manner in which it works is quite simple if thought through carefully, the whole process being merely a response to a given situation. The impulses pass by means of nerves to the brain, and the brain transmits them to the proper muscles which do the necessary work in protecting the body and answering calls of varied nature.

The arms and legs are very important organs which contain other organs within themselves. Since we use our arms and legs so much, it is not necessary to list their functions, which are almost innumerable. The organs within the arms and legs are various nerve endings. These are quite numerous and their function is not simple, but at the same time not so complex as that of the brain. The principle is the same, but the actions are slightly simpler. Here is one type that looks like an umbrella upside-down. Another looks like a group of prison bars. These endings are situated in the skin and they tell temperature, touch and various influences of chemical nature. Some of them are located in the muscles and here they do a very funny job without which a person is in a dire strait. They tell where the part of the body is in relationship to other parts of the body. This enables us to put a glass up to our mouths without spilling the water in it, or telling where our arm is out in space. These nerves are the so-called nerves of kinesthetic sensitivity. By virtue of their action, a normal person can shut his eyes and tell position of his fingers so well that he can bring any two together out in empty space, a task which no person or animal could very well survive without.

The organs of the torso are the least known, for they are under cover and with good reason. To insure proper functioning, the body has developed a wall around these organs and they are in a general class for the most part, we commonly call them the belly, or the guts. The lungs are in the upper part of the torso and their function is the transmission of oxygen from the air and small lung sacs to the blood. The belly of the human contains the liver, spleen, the stomach, the intestines, the colon, the rectum, the pancreas and the kidneys. The liver is the heaviest organ of the body, and is the largest, too. The functions of the liver are body defense, storage of vital materials and secretion of enzymes for the digestion of food. The spleen is not the most important part of the belly, but its function is quite important and that is the absorption of impurities and the destruction of bacteria in the blood for which it acts as a filter. The stomach does not absorb food, a common misunderstanding. It secrets enzymes like the liver and its enzymes end up in the intestine, just like those of the liver. Ulcers of the stomach present the unique picture of an organ of digestion digesting itself. The intestines receive the contents of the stomach after they have been somewhat thrashed about and attacked by the muscles and enzymes of the stomach. The intestines are grouped as being the most important digestive and absorptive organs of the body. Many organs may be removed without the metabolism being too highly affected but any impairment of the intestines usually means death. The intestines secrete their own enzymes, as well as absorbing the food. They reject undesirable parts of the food and pass these along to the rectum and the colon. In the colon the water is removed from the waste and the waste is passed on to the rectum from which it is excreted. The great mysteries and the amazing complexity of the chemistry of foods as well as their digestion is now just beginning to come to light. From the brief statements above, one would hardly realize that many, many volumes have been written upon very minute points of the subjects, let alone the great organs themselves.

The kidney and pancreas present interesting problems; the kidney takes from the blood and thereby purifies it. The kidney removes superfluous salts, as well as harmful, even poisonous substances. It gathers all these substances into a great collecting tube, the ureter, and sends them to the bladder from which they are later eliminated as urine. The pancreas is a mysterious organ, intimately connected with diabetes. Two types of



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secretion are given out by the pancreas, one being the pancreatic juice which enters the gut and serves as an aid, a really powerful aid, to digestion, while the other is the compound now known as insulin. The insulin is secreted by a special group of cells and the most remarkable work of isolating the secretion was done by the two great Canadians, Best and Banting, a work to which many people now alive, healthy and able to participate in the affairs of the community owe so very much. This superficial examination of the organs can hardly introduce one to the miracle of the body and the marvelous mechanics which the body sees fit to and does utilize. It may give some small indication of why doctors are hard to train and teach and also of the magnitude of the knowledge which they must have to perform their much needed and highly important task efficiently.

# THE PARACHUTIST'S FREE FALL

## By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

HOW do you feel when you fall? The last time you fell off that ledge, were you aware of anything about you as you tumbled to the floor? The usual answer to such questions conforms to the popular notion that there is a "semi-consciousness" during a free fall. When tumbling down to earth from a high perch, clear thinking is practically impossible, most people believe.

Science has again dispelled popular superstition. Analysis of the results of spectacular free falling parachute jumps shows not only that the human body is capable of withstanding drops of more than five miles, but that mental reactions are clear and rapid during the fall through the air.

Parachute jumps made a year ago by Arthur H. Starnes of Calumet City were studied by Chicago scientists. Detailed information, in addition to showing the above facts to be true, also points the way to new safeguards for combat pilots in trouble at high altitudes. The experiment will, undoubtedly, influence common aviation practices tremendously.

The report was prepared by Dr. A. J. Carlson of the University of Chicago and Doctors A. C. Ivy, L. R. Krasho, and A. H. Andrews of Northwestern University from records of the six free falls made by Starnes from altitudes of from 10,000 to 30,800 feet, and from studies of reactions of Starnes and others in Northwestern's low pressure chamber. Two and a half years were required for the study and analysis, climaxed by the record breaking jump Starnes made October 24, 1941, in which he fell 29,300 feet before opening his parachute. Analyses of Starnes' jumps were worked on to the present day. It was only a few weeks ago that conclusions were formulated. These, together with the complete account of the experiment, were printed in the recent issue of the Northwestern University medical school quarterly bulletin.

One of the most significant results of the experiment is singled out by the consulting scientists. They point out that the delayed parachute jump is the solution for the high altitude combat flyer in dealing with three bugaboos of wartime jumps—danger of fouling another jumper or an out of control airplane, danger from machine-gunning by enemy pilots, and danger of frostbite or unconsciousness from lack of oxygen at high altitudes.

These are the conclusions reached in the report:

Mental reactions are clear and rapid during the fall through the air.

The rate of falling varies in accordance with the relation of the weight of the falling body and the air resistance. In Starnes' six falls, the rate of falling varied, from an average of 112 to 158 miles an hour (for lower altitude leaps) to an average of 171 miles an hour in the five and a half mile fall. During the latter fall, the maximum rate was attained—229 miles an hour for a 4.6 second interval.

The heart rate during the free falls is within the normal range.

Auditory acuity is diminished during the falls.

Body position while falling varies but may be controlled to a certain extent by use of an "anti-spin" parachute, a small three-foot auxiliary parachute attached to the shoulders and released prior to the opening of the big parachute.

Starnes' total weight, including all his equipment, during the sixth fall, was 285 pounds. His equipment consisted of a pneumonograph-barograph, a transmitter to broadcast voice and heart beat, motion picture camera, altimeter, stopwatch, oxygen mask and helmet, two parachutes, electrically heated garments, and necessary batteries, oxygen tanks, and accessories.

The jumps were made from planes varying from those of the light type to a Grumman and a Lockheed Lodestar.

The important free fall number six of 29,300 feet was broken by the opening of the parachute at 1,500 feet above the ground. Time of the fall was 116.5 seconds. At 22,000 feet and again at 15,000 feet, spins occurred. After leaving the plane, the body moved horizontally because of movement imparted by the motion of the plane. Up to 9.9 seconds, the rate of vertical descent was relatively small. In between 9.9 and 14.5 seconds, the body had reached an average rate of vertical fall of 199 miles per hour.

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# ROMANCE of the ELEMENTS —

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# RADIUM By ROD RUTH and GORDON McLEAN

CONSTANTLY THROWS OFF SHOWERS OF ALPHA, BETA AND GAMMA PARTICLES—CONTINUALLY LOSES ENERGY. BUT NOT SO FAST, AT THAT. IT TAKES SOME 1690 YEARS FOR RADIUM TO DISSIPATE HALF ITS ENERGY. EVENTUALLY, RADIUM BECOMES LEAD. URANIUM, 1,500,000 TIMES WEAKER THAN PURE RADIUM CHLORIDE, TAKES 7,500,000 YEARS TO TRANSFORM INTO RADIUM!

RADIUM is number 88 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Ra and its atomic weight is .225.95. Radium is a white, shining metal, melting at 700°. It is a member of the alkaline earth family, and has properties very similar to those of barium. It is an active metal, the result of the loss of energy atoms from uranium, and eventually radium becomes lead. One gram of radium shoots off helium particles at 145,000 billion per second, 12,000 miles per second.

(NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Potassium)



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Oscar stared deep into the mysterious crystal ball

**Oscar didn't believe in reincarnation until three of his ancestors returned in the flesh. Then he wished he had!**



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# WORLD BEYOND BELIEF

By WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

OSCAR DOODLE arrived at his modestly furnished apartment every evening at six o'clock and by six ten he would be resting in his favorite chair sipping a glass of light sherry and reading the evening papers.

The sherry was brought to him by his Filipino houseboy, Chico, Oscar's one extravagance.

This particular evening was no exception to the inevitable pattern. He was seated comfortably enjoying his sherry and Chico was busy in the small kitchen, preparing dinner.

Oscar Doodle was not a remarkable man. In fact if anyone was interested in making a catalogue of the prosaic, colorless, unimportant people in the country, Oscar's name would be certain of inclusion. He had never made Who's Who; he would have been, however, a candidate for Who Cares?

His life was bounded on three sides; his job, as a minor executive in a small bank, in whose service he had slaved for sixteen years, was his chief interest. Second to this came his well-ordered and pleasant apartment, dominated by the marvelous efficiency of Chico. And last and least was the not-too-young lady with whom he kept fairly steady company, Miss Agatha Prim.

Miss Prim was a quiet, cultivated sort of person and he found her company restful. What she found in him no one ever bothered to ask.

Chico came into the room as he finished the last of his sherry.

"Dinner is ready," Chico said quietly. He was brown and moon-faced with a quick flashing smile that displayed a mouthful of large white teeth.

Oscar rose to his feet and burped gently, another of his punctual habits.

"Fine," he said. "I'm going out tonight, Chico, I wish you'd set out my gray suit."

All of Oscar's suits were gray but he and Chico never mentioned this fact. When he switched suits he simply asked for his gray suit. Chico understood.

"I'm going to a party at Miss Prim's," Oscar said, "so I'm afraid I may be a little late."

Chico nodded.

"You play crystal ball games to-



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night?" he asked. His bright smile lit up his face.

Oscar winced. Chico's question was in reference to his Agatha's almost fanatic preoccupation with various mediums, fortune tellers and the like from whom she derived the vicarious thrill of peering into the future lives of her friends.

"I'm afraid we will," he said, sighing. "Agatha met some woman at a party recently who told her of a medium who has made an intensive study of reincarnation." Oscar glanced at Chico, almost apologetically. "That's very interesting, of course," he said.

Chico nodded brightly.

"This medium will be there tonight," Oscar said, "so I suppose we'll spend the night listening to her discuss reincarnation." He coughed slightly. "Stimulating evening." He shook his head and went into the dining room where he ate an excellent meal before showering and dressing for Agatha's party.

Chico followed him to the door of the apartment and helped him into his coat.

"I will leave glass of warm milk on stove," he said.

"Thank you, Chico," Oscar said. He picked up his hat, set it squarely on his balding head and left for the party . . .

AGATHA met him at the door of her apartment with a glad smile. She was taller than Oscar by several inches and put together at rather sharp angles. She wore a quiet dark dress and no make-up. Her eyes were large and bright in the pallor of her face.

"You must come right in, Oscar," she said excitedly. "Madame Obary is here and she is *simply* fascinating!"

"I'm sure she is," Oscar said drily.

He was led into the apartment, his coat and hat were taken by Agatha's colored maid, and then he was introduced to the assembled guests.

Most of them, he reflected gloomily as he dutifully smiled and shook hands, were not worth meeting. Then he was escorted across the room to a large divan, where an even larger woman was holding court.

"Madame Obary," Agatha said breathlessly, "I want you to meet Oscar."

The creature on the couch turned her solemn, bovine eyes in Oscar's direction and nodded slowly, sending a tremor down her many chins that was like the effect of a stone tossed into a quiet pool.

She was dark with oily black hair in a bun on her neck and her arms were circled with dozens of weird bracelets. Her plain dress fitted her like a sagging circus tent.

"How do you do?" she murmured, in a quiet throaty voice. "I am always pleased to meet new disciples."

"Well, I'm hardly that," Oscar said with an uneasy laugh.

"You will be," Madame Obary said.

"Madame Obary," Agatha said, turning to Oscar with breathless animation, "has been telling us the most incredible things. Really the things that go on are *simply* amazing."

"Things?" Oscar said blankly.

"I mean incidents in the occult," Agatha said a trifle impatiently. "You've simply no idea!"

"I guess I haven't," said Oscar, feeling somehow that his reaction was a bit inadequate.

"Madame Obary," continued Agatha with a rush, "is one of the four people in the world who completely understands the theory of reincarnation."

Madame Obary cleared her throat impressively.

"One of the *three* persons in the world who understands it," she corrected severely.

"Isn't that marvelous?" Agatha said,

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turning an enraptured face to Oscar. "Just think! One of the *three!*"

"Well, well," Oscar said.

"Madame Obary's theory," Agatha went on with a breathlessness that paid high tribute to the importance of Madame Obary's theory, "is that our ancestors are alive today, but living on another time plane, and—"

"Please!" Madame Obary said, raising one hand sternly. "I will explain."

"Yes, of course," said Agatha chastened.

"ALL life is simultaneous," Agatha said in her rich booming voice, "the terms of Past, Present and Future are inaccurate misnomers. Such categories do not exist. The lives of our ancestors and our grandchildren are being lived this moment, but on a separate time plane from our own. Do you understand?"

She directed the question at Oscar and from her stern features and beetling brows it was obvious she would brook no nonsense. Oscar, her tone and manner clearly implied, had damn well *better* understand.

"I get the point," Oscar said. "It's a little vague," he added apologetically. "The main idea is clear enough, but the business about the grandchildren—" his voice trailed off weakly. He couldn't go on. The whole damn, nonsensical theory was more than a *little* vague. It was as cloudy as an opium smoker's dream and not half so attractive.

"Naturally," Madame Obary said, with a superior smile, "you will not be able to understand the more subtle implications of the theory. A trained mind is needed for such comprehension." She turned to Agatha. "Is this young man to be our subject for this evening?"

"What?" said Oscar blankly.

Agatha put her hand anxiously on his arm.

"Now don't get excited, Oscar," she said, smiling nervously at him. "I didn't tell you before, but Madame Obary needs a subject for her demonstration and I told her that you wouldn't mind. Please be helpful."

"Just what is required of me?" Oscar asked warily.

Madame Obary said, "You will be put into a trance and I will explore your subconscious mind. It is my hope to establish contact with your ancestors through your subconscious and, if the seance is successful, you may be able to communicate with them also. This is done by bridging the time planes that separate you from your ancestors. The success of my undertaking will depend completely on the sensitivity of your receptive powers."

Oscar reflected with a definite bitterness that if Madame Obary's ridiculous experiment should happen to work she would get all the credit; but if it failed, which was by all odds the more certain probability, the blame would fall on his shoulders. It didn't seem fair.

But there was nothing he could do about it.

MADAME OBARY had struggled to her feet and was already making preparations. She ordered him to lie on the divan and then asked that all the lights, with the exception of one dim lamp, be turned off. From an enormous handbag she drew forth a sheaf of papers on which were inscribed designs that looked as if they were results of a drawing class of morons.

She sat down on a chair beside the couch and spread these designs over her ample lap.

"Empty your mind of everything," she said to Oscar, as if she were referring to a garbage hopper. "Your consciousness must be a complete blank."

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One of the guests in a dark corner of the room chuckled and remarked that that shouldn't be too hard for Oscar. There was a general laugh.

Oscar squirmed angrily on the couch. Was he brought here to be mocked, humiliated, insulted? He decided that he was and, having reached that conclusion, closed his eyes and folded his arms across his chest with icy deliberation.

Agatha and the guests were in the shadows of the room and they watched tensely as Madame Obary laid one plump hand on Oscar's forehead.

Oscar felt as if a damp fish had been suddenly dropped across his eyes, but he said nothing. For he was conscious of a peculiar sensation of drowsiness. Darkness seemed to be drifting in on his mind and his eyelids were heavy. He stirred slightly on the couch and tried to open his eyes, but the effort was too much. He breathed heavily, rhythmically and the last sound he heard was Madame Obary's voice saying,

"Sleep and let your mind rest."

Oscar drifted off to sleep.

## CHAPTER II

WHEN Oscar awoke the lights were on in Agatha's apartment, but the guests were gone. Agatha was sitting on a chair beside the couch looking at him with what appeared to be a disappointed expression.

"What happened?" Oscar asked blankly, struggling to a sitting position.

"Nothing!" Agatha said sharply. "You were a complete washout, Oscar. Madame Obary was quite disappointed. And so were all the guests."

Oscar put both hands to his temples and shook his head slowly. There was a funny sensation in his head, a tired, dazed feeling. As if a legion of pygmies had walked over his brain with spiked shoes.

"Nothing happened, eh?" he said.

"Madame Obary tried for an hour to establish contact with your ancestors through your subconscious, but you were thoroughly uncooperative." Agatha pursed her thin lips in irritation. "I was humiliated."

Oscar put his hands to his head again.

"How do you know nothing happened?" he asked. "My head certainly feels as if something had."

"Madame Obary said the attempt was unsuccessful," Agatha said.

"Who are you going to believe? Madame Obary or my head?" Oscar said belligerently. He stood up and straightened his coat carefully. "I'll be going now. I think this whole thing has been completely ridiculous."

"All right, if that's the way you feel about it," Agatha said. "I'll get your coat."

"Thank you," said Oscar coolly.

He didn't sleep very well that night. And the next morning it took all of Chico's gentle ministrations to bring him back to a fairly pleasant frame of mind. He breakfasted, dressed carefully and left his apartment, still feeling depressed.

He reached the bank on time and went directly to his small private office in back of the vaults. Oscar's job with the bank entailed handling the records of the safety deposit vaults and he was daily in contact with large sums of money. He had been given the job because the president of the bank was of the private opinion that Oscar was too timid to steal and too stupid to know what to do with the money if he did steal it.

Oscar's private secretary glanced up when he entered the reception room of his office. She was a very pretty blonde girl, efficient and careful, but at sight of

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Oscar her mouth dropped open in a very unbecoming fashion. And her blue eyes widened with astonishment.

"Close your mouth, please, Miss Brown," Oscar said testily.

Miss Brown closed her mouth, but the expression of astonishment remained on her face.

"Whom did you wish to see," she asked in a faint dazed voice.

"What's the matter with you?" Oscar demanded. "I don't wish to see anyone. I want to get to work and I'll need you for dictation. Can you come right in?"

Miss Brown rose from her chair and backed slightly away from him, her eyes glassy.

"Mr. Doodle is busy now," she managed to gasp. "You'd better come back later."

"Mr. Doodle is busy?" Oscar cried. "What kind of nonsense is this? *I'm* Mr. Doodle. How could I be busy and talking to you at the same time?"

"You *look* like Mr. Doodle," his secretary said, "but Mr. Doodle is in his office. He's been here for an hour working."

OSCAR regarded his secretary severely.

"Miss Brown," he said with quiet deliberation, "I am not amused by your joke. For some reason you are acting in a most irregular manner. I am willing to overlook your conduct if you can assure me it will not happen again. I am going to my office now and I will give you a half-hour to get control of yourself. Then I will expect you for dictation. Am I making myself quite clear?"

He started firmly for his office door, but Miss Brown stepped in front of him.

"You can't go in there," she said frantically. "I've told you Mr. Doodle is working. He'll be terribly annoyed if you go in without an appointment. I don't know who you are but if you wish to see Mr. Doodle you'll have to phone for an appointment."

"You're fired!" Oscar yelled, losing control of his dignity. He shoved the girl aside, opened the door and strode into his office, shaking his head angrily.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" a voice from behind his desk asked quietly.

Oscar stared with bulging eyes at the man behind his desk. The man wore a gray suit, black tie and white stiff collar, identical with his own. And the man looked exactly like he did, scant, mousy brown hair, watery blue eyes, thin, pressed lips. All of Oscar's physical characteristics were duplicated to an amazing degree by the man behind his desk.

As Oscar stared unbelievingly at this twin of his, the man tapped the top of the desk with nervous fingers—a gesture Oscar recognized as his own when irritated.

"And what is the meaning of this intrusion, may I ask again?" the man behind the desk inquired icily.

"Who are you?" Oscar blurted. "What are you doing at that desk?"

"My name is Doodle," the man replied. "And this happens to be my desk." He smiled and said sarcastically, "Is there anything else you wish to know?"

"You're an impostor," Oscar cried. "I'm Oscar Doodle and that's my desk. You'd better clear out of here before I call the guards and have you thrown out."

"Precisely my own idea," the man at the desk said calmly. He punched a button and leaned back in his chair. "I don't know what your game is, but I've stood as much of your insolence as I intend to."

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"Now just a minute," Oscar said. He was experiencing a desperate, trapped feeling. Maybe this was all some wild dream! "I belong here," he said weakly. "I've worked here for years."

THE door of the office opened and two of the husky, uniformed bank guards entered.

They glanced at both men in the office and their faces were surprised, but their attention was directed to the man behind the desk.

"Did you ring, Mr. Doodle?" one of them asked.

"Yes, I did," the bogus Mr. Doodle said. "This gentleman here," he waved a hand at Oscar, "broke into my office a few minutes ago and I think he might be violent. Please escort him to the door. If he gives you any trouble call the police."

"Right, Mr. Doodle," one of the guards answered respectfully. He glared at Oscar. "Come on, chum, you heard what Mr. Doodle said."

"You can't do this to me!" Oscar cried frantically. He glared at the man behind the desk who was impersonating him. "You're a fraud! You know you are!" he shouted.

One of the guards grabbed him from behind and dragged him to the door.

"Shut up," he said, "or we'll call the wagon. I think you belong in a straitjacket myself."

"I demand to see Mr. Haskins, the president," Oscar yelled. "I won't be treated this way. It's—it's unAmerican, that's what it is."

The other guard opened the door and Oscar was hustled through the reception room, out into the main section of the bank and finally deposited on the sidewalk before the great bronze doors.

The two guards placed themselves in front of the door, arms crossed.

"Now be a good guy and beat it," one of them said. "You've caused enough trouble already. Go home and take a nap for yourself and you'll feel better."

Oscar stared mournfully, despairingly at the massive portals of the bank and then at the grim guards who barred the entrance. His world was collapsing about his head.

"But this is all a mistake," he said tearfully, "I belong here, I'm Mr. Doodle, I —"

"Stop wasting our time," the second guard said irritably. "If you aren't on your way in ten seconds, I'm gonna call the cops."

"But—"

"Beat it!"

Oscar winced at the harshness of the guard's voice. He gazed wistfully at the doors of the bank and then, with a dispirited sigh, he turned and shuffled away, not knowing or caring what direction he took.

HE walked for an hour, oblivious to the people he passed, dazed and numb. His brain wasn't functioning. He couldn't make any sense out of what had happened to him, nor could he figure out what he should do.

Finally he stopped at a small park and, from shear weariness, sat down. He put his head in his hands and closed his eyes. Never had he felt so completely rudderless and helpless.

He glanced dully at his watch. It was almost ten o'clock. He didn't know what to do with himself. He hadn't been away from his desk at ten o'clock on a weekday morning for over twelve years.

What could he do?

He decided, with a flash of his old invincible efficiency, to review the matter logically and calmly. Someone had decided to impersonate him, take over his job at the bank. That put him, Oscar, on the outside looking in. His task,

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therefore, was to expose this impersonator, turn him over to the authorities and thus reclaim his rightful position.

How was this to be done? He frowned and thought for a while without reaching any definite conclusions. What he needed was a confidant, someone with whom he could discuss the entire affair in all its various ramifications and then, through the discussion and in exchange of ideas he might possibly find a solution to this dilemma.

Agatha was the only person he could think of, and while she was not ideal, she would have to do. He hoped she had gotten over her annoyance of last night.

Armed with a definite plan of action he felt better. He stood up, set his hat at an angle that was extremely rakish for him and strode to the corner to wait for a street car . . .

HE reached Agatha's apartment building in about twenty minutes and went up, as was his custom, without ringing. He knocked on the door and took off his hat when he heard Agatha's light swift steps approaching.

She opened the door and a blank expression of astonishment dropped over her thin features as she saw him. She opened and closed her eyes, as if she didn't believe the evidence they were reporting to her brain.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "May I come in? I'm in trouble, Agatha, and I need your help."

The flustered expression on Agatha's face faded as she got herself under control. She straightened her shoulders and regarded him with eyes that were suddenly impersonal and haughty.

"You most certainly may not come in," she said, "and my name happens to be Miss Prim to strangers."

Oscar stared at her in bewilderment.

"What's the matter with you, Agatha?" he demanded. "I'm no stranger. I've called you Agatha for the last ten years."

"I don't know who you are," Agatha said grimly, "but if you don't stop bothering me I'll—I'll call my fiance."

"Your fiance?" Oscar echoed incredulously. "What are you talking about?"

Agatha turned and called over her shoulder.

"Oscar, please come here. This impertinent creature is annoying me."

Oscar felt the bottom of his stomach suddenly drop about eight inches as a voice from behind Agatha said, "I'm coming," and his heart almost stopped beating when the door was opened wide and a man who looked exactly like him appeared at Agatha's side.

This new arrival was dressed in a gray suit, black tie and neat shoes—Oscar's habitual costume—and physically he could have passed for Oscar's twin. He looked as much like Oscar as had his impersonator at the bank.

"Who are you?" Oscar blurted.

"My name happens to be Oscar Doodle," the man beside Agatha said coldly, "and who are you?"

Oscar put his hands to his head and stared wildly at the man in the door.

"You can't be Oscar Doodle," he said hysterically. "I'm Oscar Doodle. I've always been Oscar Doodle." He pointed desperately at Agatha. "She's my girl."

The man who called himself Oscar Doodle frowned.

"That will be enough of your impertinence," he said sternly. "This woman," he said, putting an arm about Agatha's thin shoulders, "will soon be my wife." He took her left hand in his and Oscar saw that Agatha's third finger was adorned with a large, sparkling diamond engagement ring.

"No!" Oscar cried. "This is all some

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nightmare. Don't you see? I'm Oscar Doodle!"

Oscar's second twin studied him with a judicious frown.

"I do notice a slight resemblance between us," he said slowly, "but that certainly is not sufficient justification for your coming here and claiming to be me. Now I'd advise you to clear out of here before I call the state insane asylum and tell them I've got a dangerous lunatic on my hands."

HE finished speaking and with a cold bow slammed the door in Oscar's face. Oscar stood in the hallway several minutes, too stunned to move.

What wild web was he caught in? What was he to do?

This was the second twin that had bobbed up mysteriously to steal a phase of his existence. A sudden thought occurred to him. Maybe this chap with Agatha was the same one that had been at the bank. That seemed logical. For it would be too coincidental for two persons who looked so amazingly like him to exist. They just couldn't.

But supposing there were actually two men who looked identically like him—one at the bank and another here with Agatha? That would mean he was cut forever from his job and from Agatha's company! She had accepted a ring from his second twin, obviously believing him to be the real Oscar.

Oscar put his palms to his temples and groaned. Where would it all end?

He found himself on the street a few minutes later walking aimlessly. When he could think logically again he decided that he had better withdraw his small bank account before one of his impersonators had the same idea. Without a job he would need money to tide him over until he landed something else.

But when he reached the bank where he kept his small account he received another shock.

The teller looked at his pass book with a frown and then shoved it back to him.

"Is this a joke, Mr. Doodle?" he asked, and it was obvious from his tone, that *he*, for one, didn't think it was a very funny joke. "You were in an hour ago and withdrew your entire account. You said then you'd lost your pass book. We issued you a duplicate and gave you all your funds and you closed the account."

Oscar gripped the bars of the teller's cage with clammy hands.

"No!" he croaked hoarsely, "there's been a mistake. That wasn't me you gave the money to, it was a man who is impersonating me."

The teller frowned again.

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Doodle," he said. "You see, we checked your signature as a formality when you closed your account and we have it on file right now. It was yours, all right." His tone suddenly became severe. "Would you care to take the matter up with our auditor?"

Oscar backed slightly away from the cage.

"No," he whispered feebly, "I guess not. It's—it's my mistake. I just remembered."

HE turned and ducked out of the bank. Spots were whirling before his eyes. His job, girl and money gone! Where would this insane comedy end? A terrible unnerving thought struck him then and he felt his face stiffen with horror as its implications swept over him.

*Supposing he wasn't Oscar Doodle!*

Maybe he was an amnesia victim! Maybe he just *thought* he was Oscar Doodle. If that were true, he was out of his mind, a lunatic. Possibly he had

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escaped from an asylum and the authorities were scouring the city for him this instant!

He skulked past the policeman at the corner with his hat pulled down over his face and his heart beating painfully fast. What if the policeman clapped him in jail and he found himself to be a wife-slayer or an axe-murderer?

None of these things was beyond the realm of possibility because if he wasn't Oscar Doodle, he might be anyone; and that "anyone" might be anybody!

His head started to ache. Everything was so bewilderingly confused.

And then he remembered Chico, his smiling, brown-faced valet, and felt a surge of relief. The fact that he remembered Chico should prove that he was actually Oscar Doodle, and he suddenly felt that if he could get to Chico, have a cup of his incomparable beef broth and relax quietly in his comfortable chair he would be able to think his way out of this mess.

His anxiety to see Chico was so urgent that he forgot his usual economic scruples and took a cab to his apartment. He trotted quickly up the steps, feeling better every second. In his own quiet apartment, relaxed and comfortable, he'd feel like himself again.

He let himself in with his key and walked happily into his familiar, comfortable living room. There was a man sitting in his chair, smoking, and reading a newspaper, and when he put the newspaper down and glanced up, Oscar's jaw dropped foolishly and the triphammers of panic started thudding at his brain again.

*For this man was another twin!*

## CHAPTER III

THE third twin was wearing Oscar's dressing gown and his feet were comfortably shod in Oscar's felt-lined slippers. He was sipping a glass of sherry and one of Oscar's cigars was in his hand.

"What are you doing here?" Oscar blurted, but he had the horrible conviction that the question was superfluous.

The man in the chair looked at him with well-bred surprise.

"Where else would I be?" he asked. "This is my apartment. I think the question should be put to you. What are *you* doing here?"

"This isn't your apartment," Oscar wailed. "It's mine. I pay the rent."

"My good fellow, I'm afraid you're suffering a slight delusion. I am Oscar Doodle. This is my apartment. I started for work this morning, but returned to nurse a slight cold, which is why I happen to be here now. If you're satisfied I wish you'd leave me to my paper. You'll find the door just behind you," he added dryly.

"You can't order me out of my own apartment," Oscar cried frantically. He stared wildly at the glass of sherry in the man's hand. "What do you mean drinking my wine? and smoking my cigars? You're the one who's going to get out!"

"Pardon, what is trouble, please?" a soft voice said from the doorway of the adjoining room.

"Ah, Chico," the third twin murmured, "will you please show this gentleman to the door?"

Oscar wheeled to Chico, who stood in the doorway, a smile of confusion on his round, brown face.

"You know me, Chico," he said imploringly.

Chico smiled in bewilderment and turned to the man in the chair.

"Look much like you Mr. Doodly," he said.

"Yes, I noticed the resemblance," the

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third twin said, "but I'm not flattered. Will you see that he finds the door all right?"

Chico moved toward Oscar.

"Please go now," he said. "Mister Doodly say you must leave."

"Chico!" Oscar cried, "look at me. I'm Mr. Doodle, your employer."

"Please go now," Chico repeated implacably.

Oscar's shoulders sagged and he felt the lead weight of despair pressing in on his brain. What was there for him to do?

He turned and stumbled toward the door. Chico followed him and held the door, smiling politely.

"Come again," he said, and closed the door firmly when Oscar passed through to the hall.

THE enormity of this last shock numbed Oscar to the point that he was unable to make even an attempt to think. He wandered dazedly down the steps and onto the street, hardly conscious that he was moving.

He felt like a man without a country. Everything in his life, everything cherished and familiar had been stolen from him by these damnable twins, leaving him a homeless, jobless, penniless derelict. There was no one to whom he could turn, no place he could go for comfort and solace.

He plodded along miserably, wondering vaguely what would become of him. He was even too old for the army. No one wanted him, and there was no place he could call his own.

He walked aimlessly the rest of that day, not stopping for lunch or dinner, and when it became dark, he found himself in a strange part of the city, miles from his apartment. He realized that he was hungry and tired. He thought of Chico's excellent meals, his wide, comfortable bed and a groan of pure anguish passed his lips.

Gone forever!

He counted his money and found that he had almost ten dollars in his wallet. He had to sleep so he stopped at the first hotel he came to, registered defiantly as Oscar Doodle, went up to his room and fell asleep on the bed without removing his clothes . . .

OSCAR slept like a dead man, until he was awakened by a sharp, imperious knock on the door. He opened his eyes and stared into the darkness of the room, unable to imagine where he might be. Gradually the events of the day filtered into his mind and he struggled to a sitting position on the bed. The knock that awakened him was repeated; he turned on a light and walked to the door.

"Who is it?" he asked cautiously.

"Oscar Doodle?" a voice asked.

"Yes. What do you want?"

"We must see you. It is imperative. Please open the door."

Against his better judgment Oscar unlocked the door, but before he could turn the kob, the door was shoved open and two men strode into the room.

Oscar fell back and stared at them with wide, astonished eyes. For they were two of the identically similar men who had entered his life the day before. They were his twins in every respect, except that instead of looking astonished, they wore expressions of grim anxiety.

One of them closed and locked the door while the other turned to him and waved to a chair.

"Sit down," he ordered crisply, "we have quite a lot to say to you."

Oscar sat down meekly, but his astonishment was fading and another emotion was replacing it—anger.

"I've got a lot to say to you, too," he said grimly.

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"That can wait," the man who had done the talking said, taking a seat on the edge of the bed. Oscar's other twin, after locking the hotel room door had taken the remaining chair and was staring intently at Oscar.

"Well, what do you want?" Oscar demanded. "Haven't you messed my life up enough without ruining my sleep to boot?"

The man on the bed said, "Control your temper. We're all in a bad spot. First, let me introduce ourselves. I am, as nearly as I can compute, your fourteen times greatgrandfather. By virtue of my seniority, and to simplify things, think of me as Oscar Doodle the First. My companion," he said, waving negligently to the other twin, "you may consider Oscar Doodle the Second. He, incidentally, is my great-great-great-grandchild. You'll have to take my word for these things." He grinned wickedly. "And my word, as any of my cohorts of the fourteenth century could tell you, isn't worth a tinker's dam."

Oscar stared at the speaker with unbelievingly eyes.

"You can't be serious," he gasped.

"I am completely serious," Oscar Doodle the First said dryly. "We were brought to this time plane through the medium of a sorceress who used your subconscious mind to complete the transition. You had better accept that fact my much-removed grandson and stop staring at me with bug-eyes. I, for one, was delighted at the change. At the time of the good witch's intervention I was languishing in an unpleasant jail. I find your apartment much more comfortable."

"So you're the one who took my apartment!" Oscar cried indignantly.

Oscar the First smiled. "Yes. Oscar the Second took your—ahem—beautiful damsel."

Oscar the Second grunted sourly.

"I certainly got stung on the deal," he said bitterly. He glared at Oscar. "I can't say much for your taste in women."

OSCAR stared at his twins in bewilderment.

"What kind of a deal are you talking about?"

"I'll explain," Oscar the First said. "You see three of us were brought here to this time plane through the medium of your subconscious mind. We knew all about you, everything you did and thought, because we had been in contact with your mind for some time. When we arrived we were penniless, friendless in a great, strange city. Our only recourse was to move in on your life. We divided your existence, in a manner of speaking." He spread his hands and smiled at Oscar's obvious confusion. "It was really simple. I took your apartment, Oscar the Second here took your girl and Oscar the Third, the other member of our trio, appropriated your job. You see that gave us all a measure of comfort and security."

"But what about me?" Oscar wailed. "I'm out in the cold. I haven't got anything left."

"That's right," Oscar the First said blandly, "I knew you'd catch on. And one other thing. We divided your bank account. It was the only fair thing to do."

Oscar stared bitterly at his two twins from Time.

"And what do you want now? Did you discover I have some gold fillings you overlooked in your original inventory?"

"Nothing like that," Oscar the First, who seemed to be the spokesman, said. "We've come to you about something which may jeopardize our pleasant little set-up. You see we made a rather un-

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happy choice when we put Oscar the Third in your job at the Bank."

"Why?" asked Oscar.

"It so happens," Oscar the First said, "that Oscar the Third was a notorious confidence man and thief in his own time level and we're afraid that he might revert to type in the presence of all the money surrounding him in his new job."

"Oh my God!" Oscar groaned.

"You see," Oscar the First said quietly, "it's no light matter. What would happen to all of us if our light-fingered relative decided to stuff his pockets with money and leave for parts unknown? The situation would become awkward. Descriptions would be broadcast, your apartment would be searched immediately, your girl would be questioned and," Oscar the First paused eloquently, "the police drag-net would catch all of us."

"I, for one," Oscar the Second said moodily, "would relish a change." He glanced disgustedly at Oscar. "That female of yours would make a man yearn for prison bars."

"You didn't have to give her an engagement ring, did you?" Oscar snapped.

Oscar the Second shrugged. "It wasn't my money I was spending. And it made the deal that much more binding."

"Come, come, now," Oscar the First put in smoothly, "this is no time for trivial details. We've got to fix things so our thieving relation doesn't get us all into trouble. Who has any suggestions?"

Oscar leaned back in his chair and smiled with sudden confidence. An idea had occurred to him that might get him out of this spot.

"I have nothing to suggest," he said calmly. "This is your baby and you can spank it. I've been gyped out of my job, my apartment and my girl, so why should I want to help you anyway? Now I'm going back to sleep. Will you leave quietly or shall I call the house detective?"

His two twins stood up uneasily.

The first Oscar said, "Not a very sporting attitude, old fellow. But if you won't help, you won't. We can't very well make you."

When his twins had left Oscar stretched out on the bed again, but he was smiling contentedly. Before he went to sleep he put in a call for six in the morning. He'd show these intruders from the Past where to get off at . . .

OSCAR was at the bank the next morning before the doors were opened. His plan was simplicity itself. He'd simply beat his twin to the job and then, when his obnoxious impersonator arrived, he'd have *him* thrown out.

He was so anxious to get to his desk that he failed to notice the rather peculiar look the watchman gave him when he opened the door.

"Good morning, Mr. Doodle," he said carefully.

"Morning, John," Oscar said and hurried past him to his office.

It was a little after eight and he was the first one at the bank. He settled himself at his desk brim-ful of confidence. He'd show 'em. At least he had his job back now and he was certain he'd be able to reclaim the other lost phases of his existence.

He worked for an hour, happily doing the routine work that he had done for years, and he kept one eye peeled on the door awaiting the arrival of his impersonator. While he was waiting he did a little thinking of his conversation the previous night with the men who claimed to be his ancestors. He wondered if there was any stock in their

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story. They said they had been brought from their own time levels through the medium of a sorceress. That would be Madame Obary. She had told him she was trying to communicate with his ancestors through his subconscious mind. Maybe her scheme had worked too well. Instead of just communicating with his ancestors it looked as if she had brought them to the Present in the flesh.

Oscar shook his head. What a mess she had made for him. But he wasn't going to stay licked. Reclaiming his job was only the first step in the battle. He'd keep fighting until he'd driven these unwanted ancestors of his completely out of his life.

His thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door. He smiled in anticipation and squared his shoulders.

"Come in!" he said sternly.

The door opened and his blonde secretary entered. She stared at him in astonishment and then a frantic expression of worry appeared on her face.

"Mr. Doodle," she cried, "what are you doing here?"

Oscar cleared his throat severely.

"Where else would I be, Miss Brown?" he inquired dryly.

"But you can't stay here," Miss Brown said, looking wildly about the room. "You've got to hide. I'll help you. I won't tell anyone I've seen you." She crossed to his side with quick, anxious steps and took his arm in her hands and pulled him to his feet.

"Please," she said imploringly, "you can hide in the closet. Then tonight I'll help you slip out."

OSCAR removed his arm from her grasp.

"I don't know what's come over you, Miss Brown," he gasped. He stared into her anxious, worried eyes and shook his head. "You're talking nonsense. I think you had better take the rest of the day off and rest."

"But you've got to listen to me," Miss Brown said pleadingly. There were tears of concern in her eyes and her pretty face was clouded with worry. "There's no time to waste. They'll be here any minute."

"Who will be here any minute?" Oscar demanded. "And why should I hide in the closet because some person or persons unknown are visiting me in my office? I have done nothing wrong. I don't need to hide from anyone."

The door had opened as he was speaking and when he finished a hard, cold voice said, "It wouldn't have done you any good to hide, Doodle, the game is up."

Miss Brown turned on slim ankles as three heavy-set men walked heavily into the office.

"I tried to tell you," she wailed, turning back to Oscar.

Oscar stared at the three men with dazed, uncomprehending eyes.

"What's all this about?" he asked.

"Don't pull the innocent act," one of the men said sarcastically. He flipped his coat lapel aside, displaying a gleaming police shield. "I'm Higgins from Central. We want to have a little chat with you down at the station. Get your coat."

Oscar sat down heavily. He felt as if he had been struck at the base of the skull with a stuffed eel skin.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said weakly.

"You will soon, then," Higgins said. "Forty thousand bucks was stolen from here last night and we've got three witnesses from the bank who say you're the man who pulled the job."

Comprehension dawned on Oscar and he felt his mouth going dry. A cold hand of terror was closing over his heart. His twin, his pilfering ancestor, who had

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impersonated him yesterday, had stolen forty thousand dollars from the bank. And the police thought that *he* was the one who had committed the robbery.

He stared wildly at the grim faces of the three policemen.

"No, no," he cried hysterically, "you've got it all wrong. I didn't steal the money. It was someone who looked like me. I'm innocent."

"You'll be given a chance to prove it," Higgins said. "Now get your coat."

Miss Brown was sniffing into a handkerchief in the corner.

"Oh, Mr. Doodle," she wailed, "why did you do it?"

HIGGINS smiled sardonically.

"So you're innocent, eh? You'd better start talking, Dooodle. Where's the money?"

"I don't know," Oscar said wildly. "I haven't got it."

"Then where did you hide it?"

"I didn't hide it," Oscar cried. He looked entreatingly at the grim circle of faces. "You've got to believe me."

"All right," Higgins said, "you're going to be tough. We can play that game, too. Get your coat and don't make me ask you again."

Oscar staggered to his feet and put on his coat.

"This is all a mistake," he bleated.

"Sure," Higgins said, "and you made it."

Miss Brown caught his arm as he walked to the door.

"I'll come and see you, Mr. Doodle."

Oscar swallowed and walked through the door, too dazed to answer. He wondered vaguely if Alcatraz was air-conditioned in the summertime.

## CHAPTER IV

OSCAR sat in a small grim cell with his head buried in his hands. This was his blackest hour. Three witnesses from the bank had just left, after testifying with some reluctance that they had seen Oscar the previous afternoon cram cash into a black leather bag before leaving for the day.

The case against him was air-tight. He was doomed unless he could, somehow, find his impersonator and make him return the money. Oscar raised his head and stared gloomily at the solid bars of his cell. There was no chance of getting out of this place, and unless he did, there was no chance of ever proving himself innocent.

He sighed and dropped his head back to his hands. A few minutes later he heard a footstep outside the cell. He looked up and saw Higgins, the detective, standing outside the cell, hands in his pockets and a large cigar in his mouth.

"Still ain't talking, eh?" Higgins murmured.

"I tell you I've got nothing to tell," Oscar said. "I didn't steal the money, so I don't know where it's hidden."

Higgins took the cigar from his mouth and stared reflectively at its glowing tip.

"I'll be frank with you, Doodle," he said, "you haven't got a chance of escaping conviction with your yarn. The judge will instruct the jury to convict and that means your worries will be over for the next few dozen years. But a conviction like that doesn't do us any good. We want the money. The insurance company is already raising hell with the chief. They want the money and they don't give a damn about the thief." Higgins leaned closer and blew a slow smoke ring into Oscar's cell. "Now if you play ball with me, give the tip on where the stuff is hidden, I'll see to it that the judge goes light on you. You'll be a free man in a few years. But," he shrugged, "if you don't want

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to talk we'll make it as tough on you as we can. We'll try you for everything on the book and give you life. Now what do you say?"

Oscar swallowed miserably.

"What can I say? You won't believe me when I tell you I didn't take the money. You won't believe me when I tell you I don't know where it's hidden. But I am telling the truth."

"Okay," Higgins' face hardened. "Play it your way, Doodle, but don't expect any favors from now on."

He turned and strode down the corridor. Oscar stretched out on the cot and stared despairingly at the ceiling. He was through for good.

A few minutes later there was a light tap of feminine heels on the floor and when he looked up his secretary, Miss Brown, was standing outside his cell with a guard.

Oscar rose quickly to his feet.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I had to see you," Miss Brown said. Her p r e t t y face was worried. "You aren't angry at me for c o m i n g, are you?"

"No, not at all," Oscar said. He felt very glad that she had come. It made him feel, somehow, less alone.

The guard o p e n e d the door and closed it when she stepped inside the cell.

"You got about six minutes," he said and moved down the corridor.

OSCAR led Miss Brown to the cot and they sat down, hands clasped together.

"Now tell me why you came, Miss Brown," Oscar said.

"I know you aren't guilty, and you can call me Betty," Miss Brown said, on one breath.

"Thank you—Betty," Oscar said, rather hesitantly, and then the full impact of her words hit him. He grabbed her shoulders tightly. "You *what?*"

"I know you aren't guilty," Miss Brown spoke in a tense, conspiratorial whisper. "I didn't realize it until after you'd gone. But that man who worked at the bank yesterday wasn't you. I know that for certain."

Oscar felt a flood of relief that left him weak and shaky.

"How did you know?" he asked eagerly.

"Well," Miss Brown dimpled, "he tried to kiss me."

"Oh," Oscar said flatly. He looked at Miss Brown and saw that she was pretty in a soft, pleasant sort of way. And her eyes were a fascinating shade of blue. "What makes you sure I wouldn't try to kiss you?" he asked moodily.

"Oh, I just know," Miss Brown said, "and I wanted to tell you I'm going to do everything I can to help prove your innocence."

"Thank you," Oscar said. He wanted to say more but he couldn't. There was a lump in his throat that made talking difficult. He p a t t e d her hand awkwardly. "Thank you," he said again.

The guard reappeared at the door.

"Time's up. Got another visitor for you, Doodle," he said.

"I wonder who this can be," Oscar said, as Miss Brown walked to the door. He shook hands with her and said, "You will try to come a g a i n, won't you?"

"Yes," Miss B r o w n nodded, "I'll come again. And I'll be working for you on the outside."

She squeezed his hand and then stepped through the door and was gone. Oscar walked back to the cot and sat down, but there was a vision of blue eyes still before him. What a blind bat he was! She had worked for him for years and he had never once realized

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how wonderful and loyal she was.

The guard opened the door again and a medium-sized man wearing dark glasses and baggy, nondescript clothes walked into the cell. Oscar had never seen him before in his life. The stranger's face was concealed by a bushy red beard and mustache and a slouch hat was pulled down over his eyes.

"You got six minutes," the guard said, and moved down the corridor again.

Oscar stood up and regarded the stranger uncertainly.

"You are Oscar Doodle?" the stranger asked, and Oscar found his voice strangely familiar.

He nodded.

"But who are you? You have the advantage of me. Have we met before?"

"Yes," the stranger said, "we met last night."

HE STEPPED to the barred door and peered up and down the corridor. Satisfied, he swung back to Oscar and smiled.

"Maybe you will recognize me now."

He tugged at his red beard and it came away from his face. It was attached to his ears by rubber bands.

Oscar drew a surprised breath. The red-bearded stranger was one of his twins from Time, one of his impersonators who had gotten him into this terrible mess.

"Which one are you?" he asked indignantly.

"Ssssh," his twin said warningly. He glanced cautiously over his shoulder and let his beard slip back into place. "I am Oscar the First, remember? I took over your apartment and Chico."

"I remember," said Oscar bitterly. "And how are you enjoying yourself these days?"

"That's why I'm here," Oscar the First said in the same cautious voice. "We're in a spot." He glanced about the barred cell and shuddered. "Nothing but the utmost urgency would make me step willingly into one of these confounded jails. You remember I told you I was behind bars at the time I was whisked to this time level by your medium."

"Yes, I recall that," Oscar said stonily, "and it didn't endear you to me. What is it you want now?"

"Help," Oscar the First said. "We're desperate. The police are camping at the apartments of both yourself and your hag."

"Where is Chico? How is Agatha?" Oscar asked.

"Chico is gone," Oscar the First said, "and your precious Agatha has issued a statement to the press breaking her engagement to you. Of course you shouldn't feel badly about *that.*"

Oscar sat down on the edge of the cot, stunned. Chico gone and Agatha—he paused and examined his emotions. No, he didn't feel bad about Agatha, but Chico—

"Where do you suppose he's gone?" he asked.

Oscar the First shrugged.

"It doesn't matter. He's pulled out. Now there are two of us left. There's been no trace yet of our light-fingered relation. But we've got to have money and a place to go. You're our only contact. You must have some funds stacked away for a rainy day. And we thought you might have a lodge or a cottage somewhere in the country that we could use until all this unpleasantness has blown over."

"You mean until I'm sent up for a life term in prison," Oscar said grimly.

Oscar the First smiled behind his red beard.

"I didn't want to be so blunt," he said. "Now be a good chap and help us out. You certainly can't use money

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where you're going."

"No, I can't," Oscar said.

HE REGARDED his twin with narrowed eyes. An idea had popped into his head that ordinarily his logical cautious mind would have shunned with horror. But Oscar's personality was undergoing a subtle change. This situation called for radical measures and Oscar had reached the point where he was jumping at straws.

"It so happens," he said musingly, "that I have got a bit of money tucked away, and, as you say, it won't be doing me any good."

"That's the spirit" Oscar the First said, clapping him on the shoulder.

"And," Oscar continued thoughtfully, "possibly you could use part of the money to help me obtain a pardon, not right away, but say in four or five years."

"The very thing I was thinking of," his red-bearded ancestor said enthusiastically. "Now the money. Where is it? Where have you got it hidden?"

"It's right in this cell," Oscar said. He leaned closer and whispered, "right under this cot."

"No?" his twin whispered incredulously. His eyes brightened behind the dark glasses. "Why, that's wonderful! It'll save us all so much time."

Oscar glanced cautiously at the door.

"I'll watch for the guard," he whispered, "and you get the money."

Oscar the First was grinning from ear to ear.

"Excellent, e x c e l l e n t," he said, "watch sharply now."

He dropped to his knees and put his hand under the bed.

"I don't feel it," he said.

Oscar stood up and rubbed his fist carefully.

"You will," he said sweetly.

He swung d o w n w a r d with all his strength at the other's beautifully exposed jaw, and the sound of his fist meeting bone echoed in the cell with a satisfying smack.

Oscar the First sagged to the floor without a moan.

Oscar surveyed his efforts with a deep, welling sense of triumph. There was something primeval and joyous about striking an enemy to the floor with one blow of a fist.

But he didn't linger long with his sense of satisfaction. He took one look down the corridor to see that the coast was clear and then returned to the still form of his ancestor and went quickly to work . . .

IN THREE minutes he stood up, attired in the other's baggy clothes and wearing his red stage beard, dark glasses and slouch hat. His own clothes he had put on the still unconscious form of Oscar the First. He was smiling as he lifted the limp body from the floor and stretched it out on the cot. The man on the bed was his physical twin, identical in every respect, and attired in Oscar's discarded clothes. No one would ever suspect that he was not the real and original Oscar Doodle.

He finished the transformation not a minute too soon.

The guard returned and opened the door.

"Time's up," he said.

"All right," Oscar said. "I'm ready."

He bent down and gripped the unconscious man by the shoulder.

"Don't give up hope, son," he said. Shaking his head somberly he left the cell and walked down the corridor with the guard.

"Doodle's taking it pretty hard," he said regretfully. He glanced sideways at the guard. The man was walking along stolidly, chewing a wad of tobacco with slow movements of his jaw.

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"That's the way with them thieves," the guard said, without breaking the rhythm of his chewing. "Don't think about that when they're puttin' other folks' money in their pockets. Get all sad and pious though when they get behind bars." He spat forcefully. "Too late then."

"I suppose you're right," Oscar said tactfully, as the guard let him through the last gate.

" 'Course I'm right," the guard said, chewing steadily.

"Yes of course, good night," Oscar said.

He walked down the steps of the police station trying not to hurry. He forced himself to walk casually, carefully, until he was a block from the building. Then he began to walk rapidly, but he hadn't taken a dozen steps before a hand grasped his arm.

He stopped and turned guiltily to a man of his own height, who wore a black beard and dark glasses under a floppy slouch hat.

"What luck?" this man asked tensely. "Did he have any money?"

Oscar tried to keep his relief from showing in his face. He realized that this bearded, dark-glassed fellow was his other impersonator, the one who had moved in on Agatha; and he also realized that this man was mistaking him for his confederate, Oscar the First.

"Well?" the fellow repeated impatiently.

Oscar was t h i n k i n g rapidly. He knew now that the only person who might help him get rid of his impersonators was the person responsible for bringing them here in the first place—Madame Obary.

He couldn't let this twin get out of his hands. He had one locked securely in jail and that meant there was only one at liberty. If he could somehow find that one—the one who had absconded with the money—he'd have them all, and then maybe Madame Obary could do something to send them back to their own times.

"Come with me," he said to his black-bearded twin.

"Did he have some money?"

"Yes," Oscar said. "He told me where to go to get it."

He hailed a cab and hustled the other inside and gave the driver Miss Brown's address. This last was like an inspiration from Heaven. He hadn't a friend in the world, except Miss Brown. If she wouldn't help him, there was no hope . . .

## CHAPTER V

SHE answered the door herself, and her pretty face clouded as she saw the two bearded strangers standing in the hall.

"What do you want?" she asked. "You aren't selling cough drops, are you?"

"We came from Oscar Doodle," Oscar said. "He said you were a friend of his."

"Come in," Miss Brown said quickly. She closed the door hastily and led them into her small, daintly furnished living room. "What about Oscar?" she asked.

Oscar hesitated. He couldn't reveal himself or Oscar the Second would be suspicious. So he said, "I can't tell you everything right now, but we are his friends and he wants us to stay here for a few days with you."

Miss Brown looked helplessly about the small apartment.

"Well, certainly," she said, "but I don't know where I'm going to put you. Maybe you can take my bedroom and I'll sleep here on the couch."

"That's fine," Oscar said. "Could you show us your bedroom now? We'd like to get to sleep."

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"But it's only eight o'clock," Miss Brown said, looking at him in astonishment.

"I know," Oscar said, "but we've had a long day. And we need our rest if we're going to help Oscar."

"Come with me then," Miss Brown said.

She led them into her bedroom, which was prettily furnished in pink and blue. There was one single bed.

"One of you will have to sleep on the floor," she said.

"That will be fine," Oscar said, shoving her gently toward the door. "Good night."

"Good night," Miss Brown said dubiously. She closed the door and left them alone.

"What was the reason for this?" Oscar the Second said. "And where's the money?"

"We need a place to stay, don't we?" Oscar said. "The money," he lowered his voice and glanced over his shoulder at the closed door, "is under the bed."

"Under the bed?"

Oscar nodded impressively.

"You get it and I'll keep a watch for the girl."

Oscar the Second smiled enthusiastically and dropped to his knees.

"This is wonderful," he said, sticking a hand under the bed.

"It's going to be," Oscar said.

"I don't feel a thing," Oscar the Second said plaintively.

"Don't worry, you will," Oscar said. He gazed tenderly at his fist and swung mightily . . .

FIVE minutes later he opened the door and walked quickly into the living room. He had removed his wig, glasses and hat.

"Oscar!" Betty cried. She scrambled from her chair with a flash of silken legs and ran to his side.

"Betty," Oscar murmured, taking her in his arms awkwardly.

"How did you get out of jail?" Betty asked wonderingly. "And who are those two men in the bedroom?"

"Sit down, my dear," Oscar said, "and I'll tell you everything."

When he finished his story Betty's eyes were shining.

"I think you're just wonderful," she murmured. Her face suddenly sobered. "But how about the other man in the bedroom? The other twin you've been talking about?"

"I bound him securely with the cord from your bathrobe and locked him in the closet," Oscar said. "He's on tap until we need him. Now we've got to find the one who absconded with the money and then locate Madame Obary. It's a big job and I haven't the faintest idea where to start."

Betty chewed vigorously on her lower lip.

"I think I can find Madame Obary," she said. "Agatha would know, wouldn't she?"

Oscar slapped his thigh.

"Of course she would. I hadn't thought of that. You're wonderful, Betty."

"I'll get her address from Agatha and go to her, tell her you've got to see her and bring her back here tonight," Betty said. "Will that be all right?"

"That much is all right," Oscar said, "But we still are missing one of the twins. And he happens to be the most important one of the bunch because he has the money." He shook his head gloomily. "He's probably a thousand miles from here now."

"Maybe not," she said. "Remember he's a stranger here. He wouldn't know where to go."

"By gosh, you might be right," Oscar said. "But where can I go to look for him?"

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"How about your apartment?" Betty asked. "That's the only place he knew in the city other than Agatha's. And he certainly wouldn't go back there."

"But the police are watching my apartment," Oscar protested. "I'd be picked up if I went there."

"Maybe the police have gone. Remember the police think Oscar Doodle is in jail. Possibly they've relaxed their watch."

"It's worth a chance," Oscar said, with sudden determination. "I'll get started immediately."

"And so will I," said Betty. "If everything works out all right we'll be back together, all our problems solved in a few hours."

"That's right," Oscar said brightly, then his cheer faded and he added gloomily, "*if* everything works out all right."

## CHAPTER VI

HE reached his apartment a half-hour later. To his intense relief the police had gone. They had torn the place upside down, looking for the missing money, but the disrupted apartment was like a glimpse of Heaven to Oscar.

The place was completely empty. He checked through the four small rooms, even looking under the bed, but he found no one.

His thoughts were churning helplessly as he sat down in his easy chair and tried to figure out what to do next. He couldn't just start looking for his pilfering twin. That would be like trying to find the proverbial needle in the haystack. The man might be anywhere, and in spite of Betty's optimism, he still felt that the fellow had left the city and was miles away by this time.

His nerves suddenly jumped as he heard the sound of a key in the door. He was sitting in the dark and when the door swung open an oblong of light fell across the carpet from the corridor and two figures were silhouetted in the doorway.

One figure was small; the other medium-sized. And the smaller figure had his arm about the other and was half-carrying, half-dragging him into the apartment.

Oscar stepped to the wall and snapped on the light switch. In the sudden glare Chico, his brown-faced, smiling house boy, stood blinking uncomprehendingly at him.

"Chico!" Oscar said sharply.

Chico looked at him in foggy bewilderment, then he lifted the head of the man he was carrying and peered into his features. He stared a long time before he let the head fall suddenly against the man's chest.

Oscar's pulses were hammering with excitement. The man with Chico, obviously drunk as a lord, was the third and missing twin, the absconder.

"Who you?" Chico asked abruptly of Oscar, but his voice lacked conviction.

"Chico," Oscar said sternly. "I am Oscar Doodle, your employer. Where have you been?"

"Hah?" Chico said stupidly. His ever-ready smile had deserted him. He glanced uneasily at the drunken man he was supporting. "Him Doodly," he said plaintively.

"No," Oscar said with gentle firmness, "I am Oscar Doodle. That drunken bum is an impostor."

"Impsstoter?" Chico struggled with the unfamiliar word. He shook his brown head anxiously. He was obviously working desperately to make sense out of the situation. He glanced down again at the man he was supporting. "Him not Doodly?"

"That's right," Oscar said. "He is

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not Oscar Doodle. I am Oscar Doodle."

"Oh," Chico said and there was relief in his voice. "You Oscar Doodle." His smile returned to his face and his black eyes were cheerfully relieved. He dropped the man he was supporting to the floor and nodded to Oscar. "You want warm milk now?"

"No, not now," Oscar said. "I want you to tell me how you met this fellow."

CHICO frowned and collected his thoughts.

"I come back here," he said, "find police gone. You in jail." He smiled to show that he had a tolerant view of Oscar's incarceration. "I start to clean up apartment. Then," he pointed to the sodden figure on the floor, "he come. He drunk. I think him you. He want to go out, get drunk some more. I go along, bring him back when get much drunk. That's all."

"Now think carefully, Chico," Oscar said, "when he came here did he have anything with him? A package or a grip of any sort?"

Chico nodded brightly. He opened the door of the hall closet and lifted out a small black leather bag.

"This," he said proudly.

Oscar took the bag with hands that were suddenly trembling and opened it. Inside lay a half-dozen stacks of crisp green currency. He counted the money rapidly. Thirty-nine thousand, five-hundred and fifty dollars. The loot was intact except for four-hundred and fifty dollars his pilfering ancestor had squandered during his drunken debauch.

His problems were solving themselves wonderfully. Now if he could just get rid of these two twins everything would be rosy. But that would depend on Madame Obary.

"Get him on his feet," he said to Chico, pointing to the limp figure on the floor. "We're taking him for a little ride."

On the street he hailed a cab and helped Chico to shove their drunken burden inside; then he and Chico clambered in and gave the driver Betty Brown's address . . .

BETTY met them at the door and Oscar almost fainted with relief as he saw the huge, slovenly figure of Madame Obary over her shoulder. The Madame was seated on the couch, hands clasped loosely in her lap and her bovine features were solemnly expressionless.

She looked up and nodded when she saw him.

"Madame Obary," Oscar said, when Betty had closed the door and Chico had stretched his burden on the floor, "you've got to help me. You got me into this mess and you'll have to get me out. You brought three of my ancestors to this time level and they've completely disrupted my life. Can you send them back where they came from?"

Madame Obary pursed her thick lips thoughtfully.

"I do not know," she said somberly, "I have never tried. Maybe I can, maybe I can't."

Chico suddenly tittered and pointed at the Madame.

"Crystal ball woman," he giggled. He spread his arms wide. "Blimp. Hah, hah, hah!"

"Chico!" Oscar cried.

Madame Obary turned a slow ominous eye on Chico.

"And who is this creature?" she thundered.

"My valet," Oscar said apologetically.

"Remove him from my presence," she said with an imperious wave of her hand.

Oscar led Chico to the bedroom.

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"Stay in here 'til you're needed," he said, and closed the door. "He meant no harm," he explained to Madame Obary.

The Madame sniffed.

"I do not like ridicule."

"Now please," Betty said cajolingly, "Chico was just trying to amuse you. Don't hold that against him. You will help us, won't you please?"

Madame Obary deliberated for an instant and then stood up from the couch and gestured at Oscar.

"Lie down," she said, "I will see what I can do; but do not be too hopeful."

"Thank you," Betty said fervently.

Oscar lay down on the couch and closed his eyes. His heart was hammering with excitement and hope. Madame Obary sat beside him and put her large, soft hand on his forehead.

"Sleep," she commanded in her powerful, resonant voice.

Oscar felt the familiar sensation of drowsiness crawling over him, but before he could drift into slumber, there was a sudden violent interruption.

The bedroom door swung open and his black-bearded twin strode into the room. Chico followed him, looking bewildered and confused.

"Found man in closet," he said, glancing apologetically at Oscar's black-bearded ancestor, who was standing in the center of the room, glaring angrily at Betty and Oscar. "Man tied up," he said. "Man mad."

"YOU bet I'm mad," Oscar's twin snapped. "What kind of a game are you trying to pull?"

Oscar had struggled to a sitting position on the couch and he saw that his ancestor held a large, ugly pair of scissors in his hand and he looked as if he might start using them on the slightest provocation.

"This is unfortunate," Madame Obary said, wagging her head solemnly. "There is no chance of sending a subject to another time level while he is consciously resisting."

"You bet I'm consciously resisting," Oscar's ancestor said belligerently.

"Oh," Betty cried, "why don't you be a good sport? Why don't you let Madame Obary send you back where you belong? We'd appreciate it ever so much."

"Isn't that just dandy," Black-beard said sarcastically. "Well just get that idea out of your heads. I'm not going to let myself be sent back to my own time. This place isn't my idea of Heaven, but it's a darn sight better than my life in the past, so I'm staying right here."

He glanced down at the drunken, sodden figure of the third impersonator and a bright gleam of cupidity appeared in his eyes.

"So you found the absconder, eh?" he asked. "And I suppose you found the money too?"

Oscar prayed that he wouldn't see the small black bag in the corner.

"Yes," he said, "we found it, but it's not going to do you any good."

"I'll be the judge of that," his ancestor said. "Where is it?"

"Don't tell him, Oscar!" Betty cried.

"I don't intend to," Oscar said firmly.

His black-bearded impersonator stepped suddenly to Betty's side and swung her about, twisting her arm behind her cruelly. She gave a low cry and her teeth bit into her lower lip.

"Don't tell him!" she gasped.

Oscar came to his feet.

"Let her go!" he shouted.

"Not until you tell me where the money is."

"All right," Oscar said, "I'll tell you. It's under the couch." His ancestor looked suspicious, and he added, "I'll get it for you."

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"No you don't, I'll get it myself. I'm not going to fall for any of your tricks."

He shoved Betty to one side and waved Oscar away from the couch.

"I'll get it myself," he said.

He dropped to his knees and felt under the couch with his hand. One side of his jaw was perfectly exposed.

"Where is it?" he growled.

"It's pretty far back," Oscar said, stepping forward quietly.

His ancestor grunted and shoved his arm still further under the couch.

"I don't feel it," he said.

"You will this," Oscar said, and slugged him on the side of the jaw with all his strength.

His ancestor flatttened out on the floor with a low moan.

"Now," Oscar said to Madame Obary, "get to work."

He stretched out on the couch and again the Madame laid her hand on his forehead . . .

WHEN he awoke Betty was at his side. The apartment was empty. He sat up and looked around dazedly.

"What happened?"

"Everything's all right again," Betty said happily. "You've been sleeping for an hour or so. Madame Obary left a little while ago, and I sent Chico back to your apartment to get your clothes."

"And the other two?" Oscar asked.

"They're gone," Betty said. "They're back on their own time level now."

Oscar sighed with relief, but then a frown appeared on his face.

"What is it?" Betty asked.

"How about the other one?" he said reflectively. "The one the police are holding in jail as Oscar Doodle, the embezzler. What's going to happen to him?"

Betty shrugged her slim shoulders helplessly.

"I don't know," she said, "I hadn't really thought about that."

Oscar was silent a minute, staring intently at the floor, then he looked up at her and smiled.

"I know what's going to happen to him," he said, "he's going to stay right where he is. He told me he was serving a jail sentence in his own time, so it is altogether fitting and just that he complete it here. Anyway if we sent him back to his own time he'd land in jail so it doesn't make much difference."

"But what's going to happen to you?" Betty asked. "You're Oscar Doodle, but if they send your ancestor to jail for embezzlement, where will that leave you? All your friends will think you've been sent to jail. You won't be able to live as Oscar Doodle again."

"Yes," Oscar said, smiling, "I've thought of that." He stood up and he felt a glorious sense of relief. "My friends," he said, "who are they? They don't exist. I never had a friend except you and Chico and in my new existence I'll be able to keep both of you close to me forever."

"Oscar," Betty said gently.

HE sat beside her and put his arm about her shoulders.

"Don't you see, darling," he said, "the Oscar Doodle who slaved at the bank and lived like a mole wasn't a person at all. He was just a stuffed shirt and I'm heartily glad to be rid of him. There's only one thing that is worrying me."

"What is that?" Betty asked.

"My appearance. I still look like Oscar Doodle. People I know might recognize me."

Betty drew back slightly and studied him with appraising eyes.

"No," she said, "they'll never recognize you as *that* Oscar Doodle. You've changed. Something has happened inside you and it shows in your face.

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There's a light in your eyes that was never there before, and when you smile you look almost reckless. You're another person."

"I feel like another person," Oscar said wonderingly.

"But what about the money?" Betty said. "That's a real problem."

Oscar frowned thoughtfully.

"We'll have to keep it," he said, at last. "It's the only thing we can do. The bank has been reimbursed by the insurance company, so the depositors won't suffer. If we returned the money now we'd risk upsetting the whole applecart. No, we've got to keep it."

"But Oscar," Betty said, "is that exactly honest?"

"I don't see why not," Oscar said. "We won't squander the money on our own pleasure. We'll invest it in War Bonds. That should certainly make it all right."

"I see your point," Betty said, "it's the only thing we can do, isn't it?"

Oscar nodded solemnly and drew her closer to him and tilted her chin up with his hand.

"With the money that is," he said, and kissed her firmly.

## The Editor's Notebook

**A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR**

*(Continued from page 6)*

ment that this department is being held in abeyance for the duration. We'll explain why again. It's because these letters include very many from soldiers, with addresses, etc., which are a positive clue to the enemy as to troop movements, etc. Naturally we cannot include these letters. As for civilians, we cannot allow underground agents and spies to utilize our column for code messages and such. So, we hold out the column altogether. Now do you see?

NEXT month you'll be looking for the September issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES (naturally). Well, Uncle Sam informs us that we won't have enough paper for that issue, so we must skip it. In fact, until further notice, your favorite fantasy magazine will appear on alternate months until 1) the war is over; 2) the paper situation abates. However, we are glad to do our part to conserve the nation's resources, and we know you'll appreciate the fine stories we are planning to keep on publishing. Many of you readers tell us you read the stories twice, they're so good . . . oops, we closed our rash statement department, didn't we? Oh well. . . .

WE call attention (in this emergency) to the fact that our companion magazine *Amazing Stories*, carries many fine fantasy yarns, and it will be on the stands during the months you can't buy FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, so take a hint and enjoy another fine magazine right up your alley.

TO THE million and one uses for radio you know about add that it is now being used in oil prospecting.

Oil men, when looking for new deposits, usually first look for salt domes, which are large underground openings filled with salt deposits. They know that whenever they find a salt dome, an oil deposit is near by. However, the salt domes are located far beneath the earth's surface and oil men have long been seeking a device to help them locate the domes.

The search is now over with the discovery that radio is the answer. The method is really quite simple and all the equipment needed are some explosives and a radio transmitter. Part of the prospecting crew places a stick of dynamite in the ground where oil deposits are thought to exist and explode it. The sound of the explosion is broadcast with the portable radio sending station. The other part of the crew pick up the broadcast of the explosion by radio and simultaneously hear the explosion by using sensitive instruments as it travels by means of earth vibrations through the earth's crust. These two sounds arrive at different times at the listening posts. The men know that if there are no openings beneath the earth's surface, the difference in time between the instantaneous radio reception and the reath vibration reception should be a certain amount according to the distance the sound has to travel. If the time difference exceeds this known amount, the men know that the earth vibration had to pass around some underground opening, usually a salt dome. This process is repeated at different points in the vicinity until, by mathematical calculation, the men can locate the salt dome with remarkable accuracy. They then know just where to start drilling for the oil.

WITH tire rationing in effect and the strong possibility that tire replacements for civilian use may not be forthcoming, it is a wise person who does all he can to protect the tires he now possesses.

One way to do this is to use a new powder developed by the United States Rubber Company to

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cut down on the number of flat tires resulting from slow leaks. According to Dr. S. M. Cadwell, research director of the Detroit plant, tires on moving cars produce static electricity. Research shows that in those places where the tire is separated from the inner tube, the charge that accumulates gets a chance to jump the gap by means of a spark. These sparks wear out the rubber of the inner tube causing holes.

The powder developed is a special kind of carbon black which is blown into the inner tubes. Distributing itself about the rubber walls, it neutralizes the static electricity thereby doing away with the sparks. This service can be had for only 25 cents at most service stations and is well worth the money.

IF YOU'VE carefully watched your cat for several hours at a time, you've probably noticed him arch his back and claw at the bark of a tree or the leg of a table. The common explanation of these movements is that the animal is "sharpening his claws." Another popular notion is that the cat goes through these characteristic motions to stretch and to exercise the small toe muscles upon which it largely depends for a livelihood.

Scientists explain these motions by the observation that members of the feline family scratch trees and other objects to rid themselves of large pieces of toenail. Bits of broken claws are often found sticking in these trees where cats have previously been "pawing."

In southeastern Asia, travelers have noticed whole sections of forests composed of trees whose bark was worn smooth and where there were deep scratches—more like grooves—extending obliquely, nearly a yard in length. Members of your pet cat's family were in the vicinity, it was shown. The jaguar's whereabouts are usually ascertained by watching for these tell-tale signs in the jungle. On the extreme southern parts of Argentina and Chile, the puma is known to make such marks, too.

The scientific explanation of this behavior may be more easily understood when you think of the cat's structure and way of life. Members of the cat family can hardly trim their nails by biting them (especially those of the hind legs) or by patronizing the pretty manicurist around the corner.

EXPERIMENTS have shown that the average reaction time of drivers is one-half second. That is, it has been proved that the time it takes for a person to apply his brakes as soon as he sees a given signal (a light, for example) is, on the average, the above figure.

Scientists have, as a result, suggested to safety engineers that definite tests of drivers' reaction times should be established and, basing decisions upon the average time of drivers, should eliminate all persons scoring above, say, three-fourths of a second. It has been shown that a car driven by a person having a reaction time of one-and-a-half seconds, driving at the rate of only 30 miles per hour, would continue to move forward for 65 feet after seeing (or hearing) the stop signal—a dangerous menace in our modern city traffic situations!

Another interesting sidelight of this series of experiments is the fact that reaction time is not affected by the speed at which the person is driving. Thus, driving at high speeds does not affect the person emotionally or physically enough to upset appreciably his standard rate of stopping at the signal. (It must be remembered, of course, that at higher speeds the car will travel farther even if the reaction time remains the same.)

Another of Science's important safety lessons!

MR. D. E. LATHAMER of Louisville, Ohio, has read so much about the wonders of sulfanilamide as a cure for human diseases that he decided to experiment with the drug on sick fowl. Already he has been successful in curing chickens with pneumonia and certain types of eye disease.

First Mr. Lathamer tried to give overdoses to both three day old chicks and some adult hens. He observed that the chicks lapsed into a stupor and although they seemed to snap out of it for a while they also had a relapse. However, he found that dosages of good old sodium bicarbonate put the chicks back on their feet in 36 hours.

The hens showed no outward signs of being affected by the large dosage, but after a while the eggs they laid had very soft shells regardless of the fact that their feed still contained the normal amount of vitamin D and calcium. Some of the hens were permanently affected and never laid the normal type of egg, but most of the hens returned to normal after the overdoses of the drug were discontinued. When Mr. Lathamer had found the correct dosages for his chickens, he found that they would recover from pneumonia in 24 hours and would be entirely normal.

ACCORDING to Dr. A. A. Nikitin, a research chemist of the Tennessee Copper Company, the soil of some of our Southern states can be used to fight the many insect pests attacking our crops. The talc or fine white clay found in the hills of Georgia and North and South Carolina can be combined with copper compounds to produce a dust that will spell death to the Mexican bean beetle, Japanese beetle, potato leaf hopper, and the boll weevil just to mention a few. In fact, the white dust without any other poison added is effective in forcing the pests to move to other localities in search of food. The dust method will rid the farm crops of the deadly leaf hoppers which are sucking insects and thus not easy to poison.

Although southern farmers have long used the dusting method to protect their cotton crops, they have not been willing to use the method on other crops preferring to stick to the spraying method.

And that closes the Notebook. *Rap.*

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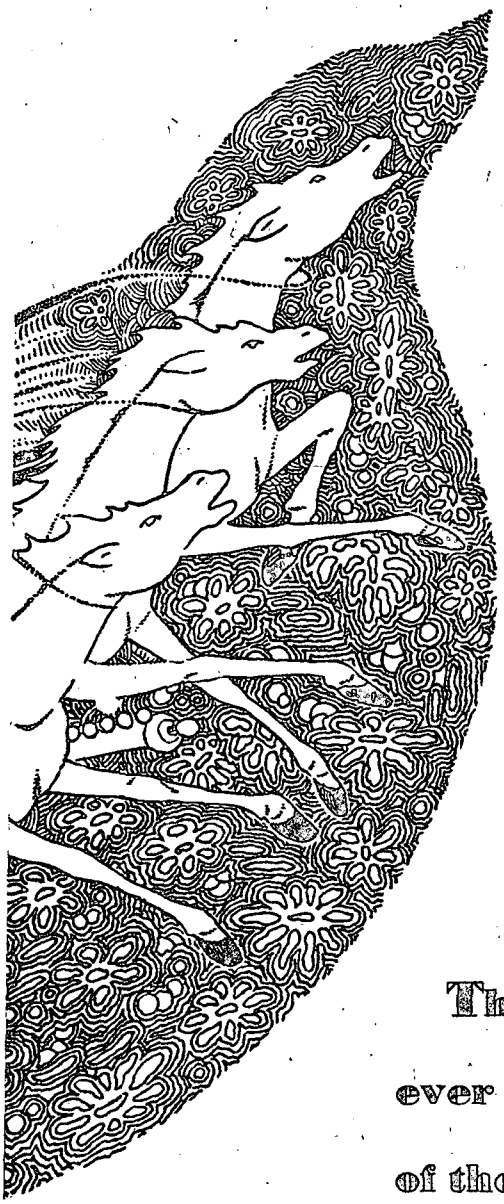
# CHARIOT of DEATH

By DON WILCOX



I WAS whizzing through space in a rickety rocket wagon—the first of its kind and in all probability the last—and I assumed that I was entirely alone.

I was banging away on the typewriter keys when my metal suitcase handle set up the damnedest rattle. What a discordant buzz! It was like a voice with a tin frog in it. . . .

Optimistic of me to have brought a suitcase? You said it, brother. The scientist who had shoved me off had assured me that my destination was death.

A *hero's* death, if you please. (If Sally had only known!)

Maybe I didn't look the hero. When it came to muscles and the much glorified square jaw I didn't quite measure up to your athletic ideal. I fell short of six feet by a couple inches or so; I was wiry and full of nerves on the jump. My friends used to tell me that I was Hollywood stuff. (Ahem!) But not your two-fisted hero. They typed me as the rattle-brained go-getter salesman who high-pressures innocent people into buying steamboats on mountain tops or Florida lots under twenty feet of water.

**The most fantastic ride a man ever took! He rode in the chariot of the Lord of Temporary Death!**



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But this superficial aspect of my nature hadn't prevented my becoming the Morning Zephyr's most notorious editorial writer, nor did it prevent my feeling like a hero now.

In all sincerity I thought I was rocketing forth to give my all.

I was banging away on the typewriter keys, recording my sensations of flight in accordance with my promise to the eccentric scientist, when my suitcase handle started annoying me with that persistent *flin-n-n-nnn . . . flin-n-n-nnn . . . flin-n-n-nndrrrs. . . .*

Disturbing, to say the least. My name is Flinders. Jim Flinders. Nothing wrong with a name like that. But some unkind individuals had added it to their repertoire of profanity after my notorious editorial exploded across the country. Hence, to have one's very suitcase handle rattle a resemblance to one's name smacked of mockery.

But when that gruesome rattle became more articulate and said, "Gree-e-e-tings, Jim-m-m Flin-n-n-nders!"—I stopped typing and reached for a flashlight. What I saw made me gulp and stop breathing.

Sitting on my suitcase was a yellowish skeleton in a flowing red robe. His kneecaps, poking out from under his garments, were polished like two old doorknobs of pale gold, and the bare bones of his toes were like two overlapping fans of jointed horehound candy. As for his face—well, you should have seen how those big teeth were grinning. I could have sworn he was winking at me, even though his eyes were perfectly hollow.

"At eeeease!" said the skeleton. "Reeeeesume breeeathing or you'rrrre mine!"

There you are. Right from the start he had me. My breath was gone—even goner than before. He had me in a knot, all right. I can't say for certain just what happened next. I must have extended my arms in a helpless gesture that meant, "Okay, brother, take me."

Anyhow, the flashlight fell down and went off, and the next thing I knew I was banging away furiously on the typewriter. For Yours Truly, Jim Flinders, erstwhile editorial writer for the Morning Zephyr, that was the natural thing to do in a crisis. Write it up while the ideas are at a white heat—or white chill, in case the inspiration is a skeleton.

WHENEVER I eased up on the rivet-gun action I could hear the rattle of that ghastly fellow's voice asking me how soon I'd be ready to talk with him. And all the time I typed I could see the glow of his white teeth grinning at me.

"You're the skeleton on the playing card," I said finally.

"Ahhh! That's better-r-r-r! You do know me, of course."

"What are you doing on this rocketship?" I picked up the flashlight and turned it on him.

"Waiting to talk with you," said the skeleton. "Why are you committing suicide?"

"I'm not! I'm on an errand for science. Maybe I'm doomed to crash, but you can't call that suicide."

"Don't raise your voice," said the skeleton. "You're a bit excited. Calm down. We're fellow travelers now and we'd just as well get acquainted and as soon as you're ready to talk—"

"Are you grinning at me?"

"Just smiling pleasantly, Flinders, my friend—"

"Are you—are you winking at me?"

"Now how could I do that? Will you tone your voice down? You're setting up an awful vibration in the bones of my little toes. As long as we're traveling together we ought to respect each other's feelings."

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"You do have feelings, then?" I asked uncertainly, and his bony head gave a slight nod.

"There, that's better. Loud voices and death don't go well together, you know. Don't let me rush you, Mr. Flinders. But I'd like you to tell me just what brought you to this. You see, we have several hours before your anticipated crash. And we're not bound for some far off planet. The fact is, we're simply spinning around the earth and we'll smash the surface one of these years—"

*"Years?"*

"At the speed we're traveling, we've already outdistanced all of your past."

What did he mean? It was only a few hours ago that I took my leave of the Morning Zephyr and the Better Business Club.

"All of your recent contemporaries are dead and gone now," said the skeleton in a very low humming voice—a curious mixture of reverence and quiet satisfaction. "Even as we talk the years are passing swiftly. And so—"

He paused and stroked his chin thoughtfully and his hollow eyes looked up at me.

"You want to know what brought me to this?" I began to feel a strange tolerance toward this lordly symbol of death. I had failed to convince myself that he was simply a figment of my imagination. Besides being well behaved, he was an excellent strategist. When Yours Truly, Jim Flinders, has just batted out a classic of personal experience on the typewriter, what could be more courteous on the part of a guest than to be interested.

"If that's what you've been writing for the past hour," said the skeleton, propping his skull on his bony fingers attentively, "let's have it—every word of it. You and I need to understand each other."

"Okay, Bonyparts, you asked for it."

## CHAPTER II

### Mass Suicide

IT WAS mid-June, 1950, and the sun came down like liquid fire.

Sitting at my editorial desk and swabbing my face with ice water, I rummaged through the exchanges. Four journals out of five carried editorials aimed at me. *Three out of four invited me to die.*

Jim Flinders, said they, should cash in!

That was their blunt proposal. They wasted no tears. They minced no punctuation. When two hundred dailies undertake to sell death to a fellow journalist, they have a way of draining the old originality keg for its last drop of fire-water.

Sally Hart had warned me it would be like this.

I had cast the first stone.

But I had not foreseen such a boomerang: Columns and columns—broadsides fired at the person of Flinders.

Call it a burst of bad temper if you want to. My political safety-valve had been near to popping off all Spring.

The whole country, as I saw it, had grown too comfortable over its troubles. *Were millions to remain unemployed, and millions more to continue on relief?*

Were we to accept this Depression as normal when a full third of the population had no economic moorings? I grew feverish and blackened my desk with think-marks.

Came that hottest day of the summer and the smouldering mind went aflame. I rang for my statistician.

"Blodgett, how many people in the United States, by your latest count?"

The Arabic juggler assumed his best mathematical face.

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"Including today's probable turnover of births and deaths?" he asked.

"Yes. No. Hold on. Check off the infants. What's the remaining total—adults and school children?"

Blodgett had the answer in a flash. "One hundred fifty-five million, two hundred and twenty-two."

"Good. Now tell me, Blodgett, how many plans have been devised for curing the nation's maladies? What's the grand total?"

Blodgett lifted an eyebrow. He was reading my motive. Blodgett's talents were never confined by the limits of pure mathematics. He saw beyond. Indeed it was this human insight, this keenness of discernment, that made him the perfect statistician for my purposes. With esoteric genius he could dive down into his puddle of figures and come up with a bright and shiny statistic that would nearly always click.

"Including the plans of school children?" he asked.

"Yes, everybody."

"It will take a moment's calculating." He drew down his brows to let the mathematical wheels turn. "By the best available surveys and estimates," he said, "it comes out one hundred fifty-five million, two hundred and twenty-one."

I compared the figures on paper: 155,000,222—155,000,221.

"Then it's true," I said. "I'm the only person left who hasn't cooked up a plan to save the country."

"An indisputable deduction," said Blodgett, the mathematics retiring from his visage. "Anything else?"

"Plenty. Tell Guy to hold space for a front page editorial in tomorrow's Zephyr."

I whirled to my typewriter. The 155,000,222nd plan was going to be something different—and I meant different—*radically*.

IN THE morning it rolled off the presses, a front-page editorial in twelve point type with a double-column black-face headline:

FLINDERS RECOMMENDS IMMEDIATE DECREASE IN POPULATION

SAYS NATIONAL CRISIS SHOULD BE SOLVED BY TWENTY MILLION VOLUNTEERS

*Spend Lives and Save the Nation!*

*Ladies and Gentlemen—What Next?*

Scores of plans have failed to lift the nation out of her economic Slough of Despond. Still she sinks, deeper and deeper, with the weight of 25,000,000 of unemployed clinging to her. What next?

The challenge of this plan is directed to you twenty-five million men who are unemployed, insecure, underprivileged. You hold in your horny hands the power of removing the nation's burden. How? By voluntarily removing yourselves. By a great, glorious mass suicide!

A shocking challenge? Ah—but consider how serious is the emergency! Silently it is sapping the vitality of American civilization. Undoubtedly you have already considered suicide in private. But naturally you hated to spill the blood. You might ruin the old rug on which you made three payments back in the last wave of false prosperity. A co-operative plan could eliminate all those troublesome details.

What of your loved ones? you ask. Don't worry. Charity will go farther, after you are gone.

Many taxpayers will find that this plan shatters their sensibilities. But they will regain composure upon reflecting that it will curtail their relief burdens about which they howl so painfully.

Face the facts, my worthy volunteers. Your plight is one of drab existence and slow death. There is no provision for you to live. You have long since been tossed on the scrap heap—and this depression has a far more permanent look to it than any in the past.

But your *death?* You still have that to give. Okay, Joe? Let you and your pals join hands in a suicide procession.

Fall in, you underprivileged millions. You are about to begin a journey to that undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler ever wires homes for money.

In the name of mercy for a stricken nation, march! With the glorious cry of "Suicide for liberation!"—March! March over mountains and across prairies, down through valleys, and finally, with one farewell wave to the good old prosperity-starved U.S.A., march right on into the sea. No blood spilt, no coffins wasted—and the sharks will do the rest. JAMES S. FLINDERS.

That was my little bomb. I suspected it would draw some foolish edi-

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torial fire and a few subscription cancellations. But I didn't expect it to set off a nation-wide avalanche. From Maine to California, the editorial broadsides came, blasting me with such captions as:

"We Nominate Jim Flinders!"

"Let Flin Head the March of Death."

"Human Sacrifice O.K. if Flinders is Human."

"Look Out, Sharks, Here Comes J. Flinders!"

Before I had finished the week of reading these returns, there was no doubt left in my mind—I was unanimously nominated to put my preachings into practice.

The first editorial I read struck me as being very funny. At the fifteenth I was clammy with sweat, and by the time I had read the twenty-third I was mumbling Hamlet's soliloquy.

The situation grew worse as the week progressed. The office boy would bring me extra ice-water and then scurry out of range of my epithets. My fellow journalists would avoid me, giving me the suspicious eye.

I had no appetite for suicide, even in my state of mental agony. I was fighting a lone battle for some means to turn the tables on my adversaries—if possible without actually resorting to suicide. But I could find no loophole that would be half so effective as the real thing.

But if the only perfect climax to my enigma were voluntary death, I had some definite views on the matter, as my editorial implied; namely, that death might be turned to a worthy purpose.

Precisely at this moment of potential suicide, the office-boy entered with the card of J. Collier Gleidermann, a name I remembered having seen in connection with scientific matters.

"Show him in."

A small, sharp-eyed, well dressed man entered the room and approached with poise.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Flinders," he said politely. "I have something of importance to discuss with you—alone."

And from that hour the career of Yours Truly was turned toward what promises to be an abrupt climax. J. Collier Gleidermann had come to my rescue with the ideal way out.

## CHAPTER III

### Death in the Cards

"KEEP on reading," said the skeleton, snapping his finger-bones at me impatiently.

"The rest is private," I said. "What's more, I'm not used to taking orders from a pile of bones."

It was an unkind thrust, considering that this amazing visitor had listened so attentively. But the fact was, my recounting of the turbulence over editorials had brought my blood back to the boiling point. I was in a fighting mood, and there was no one to snap at but this skeleton—if indeed he was a fact. I wasn't so sure. While reading, I had been flooded with suspicion: Was this creature not an apparition, born of my mental tempest?

"Read on," the skeleton repeated. "If it's private, so much the better. I need to know all about you. I intend to make you my assistant."

"That's a laugh," I said. "Any time I hire out to a rattling heap of ivory I'll *know* I'm dead."

"You hired out to me when you wrote that editorial, Jim Flinders." Again the low rattle of his voice caused a sympathetic vibration in the suitcase handle. "I stepped aboard this rocketship for a visit, so I could gauge your

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abilities and temperament. I've been looking for a man like you for many a century. Come, let's shake hands."

"Are you kidding? Why should I shake hands with a jointed clothes-tree?"

Just to prove he was nothing but a bad dream, I stepped up and took a right-handed sock at him. Sparks flew, and I drew back an arm that might have gone through a million-volt generator and come out an electric eel.

"Read on," said the skeleton once more, "or hand the sheets over to me. I'll read."

With my left hand I picked up the sensitized metal sheets from which I had been reading. I evened the pack of manuscript with a metallic cling on my desk. (The ingenious J. Collier Gleidermann had prepared metal sheets for my journal, which he had hoped would survive whatever destruction might come to the ship and me.)

I tossed the metal sheets to the skeleton. He caught them. There was a blinding flash, and the pack exploded. In his bony yellow hands—*nothing!*

"Oh-oh. Sorry," said the skeleton. "I forgot my power was accelerating. But that comical attack of yours had put me on my guard. You never know what some ungrateful jerks will pull on you. Ray guns are the bane of my existence, and it takes a full head of power for me to throw them off."

Ray guns? I'd never seen one, but I wished for one in that moment. My overdeveloped ego was suffering at the hands of this intruder.

But now he wrapped his robe closely around him, pulled his knees up, and gazed at the rounded ceiling for a time in silence. He was giving me time to cool off. He made no further apology for having destroyed my story. He was sure I would tell him the rest in due time. I gathered that he had an interesting plan of action, and wanted me to listen to his proposition.

HOWEVER, I was already engaged in carrying out one plan—that of J. Collier Gleidermann—and you can imagine my dilemma as this skeleton's powers continued to engulf me. Before I knew it I was recounting to this "Brother of the Prince of Death"—as he called himself—some of the details of my departure.

"Yes, my fiancee threw me over."

"For another man?"

"A louse named Hobbledehoy."

"You let a man named Hobbledehoy beat your time?"

"I beat my own time. It was that editorial, and all my satirical talk about mass suicide, and so on. She didn't like it. She didn't get the point. I never really intended that proposal seriously—"

"Oh, come now. Don't shatter my hopes for your success in the game of Death."

"I'm not interested in your game."

"Not permanent Death, my friend. *Temporary Death.* That's what you were really seeking in your explosive editorial. That's exactly what I have to offer: *Temporary Death.*"

The skeleton said these words with a lordly pride. He placed his hands on his hips and paced up and down the six-foot aisle of the rocket-ship, his red robe swishing with each turn.

"How," I asked blankly, "How can death be *temporary?*"

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to it," said the skeleton. "Just now we're spinning through space and time at a great rate of speed, but my calculations indicate that our time is limited. Tell me more of this man Hobbledehoy—"

"Not a man, a louse. Did I mention a playing card? He pulled that nefari-

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ous trick on me—I'm sure of it—a trick that tipped the scales. Sally couldn't forgive me after that."

"What trick?" asked the Lord of Temporary Death, pausing to tap his fingerbones against his hollow temple.

"This," I said, reaching for my billfold and removing a card from it. "I had a special gift pack of playing cards made for Sally Hart. Went to no end of trouble. Took her picture to the Magarians—you know, the artists—and had a special design made: Sally's beautiful face, her jeweled comb—her hair blowing in the breeze, her silk scarf around the back of her head, all within one of those fanciful Magarian backgrounds. You never saw such a beautiful pack of cards."

"What happened?"

"Look at the back of this ace of spades. When she found that, she couldn't take it. She sent a note back with it—said this was the last straw; I'd carried my death jokes too far."

The skeleton looked at the black and white design. It was a picture that he himself might have posed for. That is, the lower part of it. Printed into the original etching of Sally was a robed skeleton riding a chariot drawn by four white horses—a phantom race through the sky. By chance, perhaps, these two contrasting ideas were perfectly blended. Sally's blowing hair swept forward to become the reins of the horses, her scarf became the skeleton's robe, and—

"You blamed this on Hobbledehoy?" the skeleton asked with a broad grin.

"No one else. I checked with the Magarians. They assured me that there had been no change made in the original design. The cut had come back to them from the printer, and I could inspect it if I wished."

The Lord of Temporary Death was laughing at me. "Don't be blaming Hobbledehoy. What you hold there is simply *my calling card. I* placed it in your hands *myself*. You were dozing over a stack of exchanges at the time. I'm amazed that you were so absent-minded as to bury it in the blank deck you sent to the printer."

"*You—you* did this to me?"

"With no intention of having you ruin it by adding a girl's face. Very inappropriate. But I'm quick to overlook an insult. Here, have another card."

HIS yellow hand rubbed against his robed chest and came up with a handful of cards which he threw at my face. I dodged. I needn't have. The cards disappeared in the air. The skeleton got a whale of a wallop out of this shoddy joke. He laughed grotesquely for several minutes; then he settled down contentedly on the suitcase, crossed his knees, and tossed his resounding skull back in a comfortable position.

With much embarrassment I proceeded to pack the card back in my billfold. I stole a glance at Sally's photograph—habit did this for me. I had carried her picture for three years. But for the Depression she would have been Mrs. Flinders long before this.

Returning my billfold to my pocket I was reminded that I had come away carrying an unopened envelope—the monthly telephone bill. A devil of a time the company would have trying to collect that one.

## CHAPTER IV

### Breakfast on the Roof

"WHAT do you see outside the ship?" the skeleton asked presently.

I stared into the velvety void. By

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starlight I could make out the form of a chariot drawn by four white horses, racing along beside us.

Many miles below was the surface of the earth, steeped in the blackness of night. We were flying over it like a meteor, and the electrically lighted cities and highways formed fanciful patterns like tiny jewels.

"We're slowing down," said the Lord of Temporary Death. "We'll crash within a few minutes if we don't get out of here."

"Get out—how?"

"Isn't my chariot out there?"

"Don't depend on it," I warned. "What I'm seeing is probably a retained image of that playing card . . . Sally—her jeweled comb—the white horses—you—"

"*Me? Sally?* You *are* seeing things," the skeleton croaked with decided disappointment. "I'll have to watch you till you steady down. You've slipped farther than you thought. Those troubles that bent you toward suicide are still weighing."

"I tell you it wasn't suicide."

"All right, all right, I won't argue with you. All I say is, my arrangement was the ideal way out for you. *Temporary death.*"

I must have given him a blank look, for he added that I needn't mind—in due time I would understand.

J. Collier Gleidermann had sealed me in the space contraption, assuring me that I'd never need to get out; the only thing of any importance would be the record of my flight sensations, which someone might discover on some scorched mountainside sometime in the distant future.

Now that the metal records were gone I saw no harm in deserting the ship, and I didn't doubt that it was slowing down, soon to crash.

Sparks from the fingertips of the skeleton cut through the metal wall of the ship like a blow-torch through paper. A whoosh of wind burst through the opening, followed by roars and whistling and shriekings, as the whole interior of the ship was blasted by the stream of air.

Against this bombardment of wind I crossed through the opening into the chariot, depending heavily upon the skeleton's hand. And you may be sure I had reminded him to turn off the sparks before I touched him.

At once we were clinging to the chariot, sailing high above the clouds, riding into a pink dawn.

It was good that we had transferred when we did. The space ship had spent its last rocket and was nosing toward the earth.

We saw it strike. One moment it was a giant wingless silver bird with a wounded left side, skimming down toward a pale blue lake. A moment later it was a dark streak within two parallel sprays of gray water. Then it was gone, leaving no sign but the little circles of waves spreading toward the watery horizon in the distance.

"Comfortable?" the skeleton asked.

"This hack will do till a better one comes along," I mumbled. Frankly I was too scared to make conversation—but I was thrilled, too. One might dream of a ride like this in the arms of an angel. But the company of a yellow skeleton in a red robe swinging a whip over four lightning-swift horses—well, this was really something, believe you me.

WE CLIMBED down over steamy clouds that caught the first pink of dawn. When we found our way down to a cloudless level we raced on through the thin air, only a couple miles above the gray misty land.

"Nice morning," said the Lord of

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Temporary Death. "This is much better, you'll admit, than permanent death."

Beautiful skyscraper towers of streamlined cities peeked up at us through the mist. This lakeside metropolitan region was strange to me. I couldn't get my bearings.

"Nice looking age we've dropped into," the skeleton continued.

I wasn't sure whether he was talking to me or those galloping horses. The slightest sound of his voice would spur them on to another burst of speed.

We descended to the shiny steel roof of one of these structures. The four white horses came to a stop with a tapering off of hoofbeats like a crew of boilermakers finishing up a job. I supposed that this stop meant that the horses needed rest. But as soon as we alighted the skeleton snapped his fingers and those tireless beasts leaped into action.

Off they went, hoofs clattering over the steel like boilermakers on a production race. Then with a whir-r-r-r of spinning wheels and a swish of white tails flying in the air, they galloped off into the sky, empty chariot and all.

"They'll be back," said the Lord of Temporary Death. "No need to confine them while we sit here and take in the view. They thrive on exercise. Well, Flinders, how do you think we'll like living in this streamlined world?"

"Do they serve food on these rooftops?" I asked hopefully.

There was something disturbing to me within the scene of towers and canyons and neon lights, but as yet I hadn't discovered what it was.

As rooftops go this was indeed a bright spot in the heart of the city. It would have been an ideal spot for a penthouse for Sally and me, though I'm sure the space would have been inadequate for a playground for the children as the years went on—

Ah me! Why should I be thinking about that? Obviously this world was of a different century from mine. The architecture was too smooth, the parks and streets too vast, the lines of traffic too swift and silent. Four levels of traffic-ways I could distinguish in the canyon below me, and for several minutes I gazed, speechless.

Numerous signs in neons of various colors shone through the morning mist. Far down the avenue where the building tops were lost in the opaque gray I could see the words, "Sixth Avenue Traffic Way," and still farther on, "Municipal Airport."

The traffic was light at this hour of morning. Nevertheless, a few curious shaped planes—perhaps modified autogiros—were skipping around from one roof-top to another. Like as not they were taxiing people to breakfast dates.

Lord Temp had disappeared, and an uneasiness came over me.

"This'll never do," I said to myself. "I can't start leaning on a heap of bones. I'm free and independent. I'm in a land where English is spoken. I'd better get busy and make my own way. The first thing is breakfast."

"Did I hear you say breakfast," came the familiar rattling voice from the opposite edge of the roof.

I looked across to see Lord Temp approaching with a steaming tray. How he had rated this, or where, at these dizzy levels, was a mystery to me. But I didn't quibble. I ate. Ate as I hadn't eaten for many thousand miles.

"Shall I take the tray back?" I asked finally.

"Never return what you borrow," said the skeleton grinning. "It only complicates things."

HE PICKED up the tray of empty dishes, tossed it into the air,

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flung a spark at it from his fingertips. Crack! The explosion engulfed it and it was gone.

"So you think you'd like to live in this streamlined world for awhile, Flinders?"

"I wouldn't choose this particular castle top," I said, glancing at the huge neon street signs which bordered the neighboring roofs. "Eleventh Street—Twelfth Street—and Main! Ugh! Let's face the other way. My past is rising up to haunt me—along with you and your ghostly horses."

"Your *past*—ah, Flinders! Suppose we resume. *Her* name was Sally Hart. *His* name was Hobbledehoy. But *you* were the one she loved—"

"Until you slipped me your deadly calling card. That was one straw too many. When she returned the fateful card I blamed Hobb."

"Did you tell her?"

"By telephone, telegram, special delivery and short wave. I begged her to meet me that night at Twelfth and Main—where I had first met her three years before. I thought that would get her sure."

"She didn't meet you?"

"She sent a messenger back with a letter—a carbon of her message to Hobbledehoy. He had asked her to marry him at once. You see his angle—taking advantage of me while I was down. If she was willing, she should meet him that night at Eleventh and Main."

"And her message?"

"She'd decide between us before that night. We could be waiting at our respective corners at eight o'clock if we felt lucky."

"You felt lucky?"

"No. But I took my chances. Eight—nine—ten—eleven. Minute by minute I became the unluckiest man in the world. At eleven I dashed down to the corner of Eleventh, just to be sure. No Hobbledehoy. So then I knew."

Lord Temp rubbed his bony hands together in delight, and his eyes exhibited an eagerness in their hollow twinkle. Any reference to troubles which might lead to suicide gave him great satisfaction.

"Just to be sure Hobbledehoy hadn't been left in the lurch, too," I continued, "I ambled up to the Better Business Club where the boys were showing some home-made movies they had taken along Main Street.

"'Have I been featured yet?' I whispered to the sergeant-at-arms, and he said, 'Not tonight, Flinders, owing to the fact that Hobbledehoy hasn't shown up.' Which was just what I wanted to know—"

"I don't get you," said the skeleton.

"You see, Hobb would always make them show the movie of *me* because it was ludicrous. He was trying to make me the laughing stock of the club. He took the picture one morning when I chased after a newspaper that had blown out of a woman's hands. I bumped into three persons and lost my hat and knocked over a trash-can, and before I got through I had torn my clothes and a truck had run over my hat. Undaunted, I bought another newspaper and caught up with the lady and offered it to her—but she shook her head. She had just had one, thanks."

"My friend," said the skeleton, glowing, "I would give a lot to see that film. It's another proof that you *were* contemplating death."

"I beg your pardon!" I felt that he was trying to penetrate some depths within my mind that did not exist.

"Your exhibition was very costly, and it might have been fatal. Subconsciously you were responding to an

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inner drive to throw yourself in front of onrushing traffic. So you chose as your excuse the rescue of a two-cent newspaper."

"It was a five-cent paper," I retorted angrily. "And it had my editorial on the front page—"

"My apologies! I quite forgot. Was it your plan for ending the depression? And was the lady one of the unfortunates to whom your message was directed? Never mind, I'm seeing through you much better than you see through yourself, and I'm sure you'll prove a worthy assistant. How would you like to visit a few of these great cities and pass out some cards for me?"

Lord Temp slid his rattly digits against his robed side for a handful of cards and tossed them at me. This time they didn't vanish in the air. Most of them I caught in my cupped hands. A few spilled over the edge of the building and fluttered down in the breeze.

"Oh-oh," said the skeleton. "I'd better run down and see who pockets those. If our chariot returns, hold the horses till I get back."

So saying, he crawled over the roof railing and started down the walls as if he weighed less than a fly. Above the windows of the top floor he paused long enough to remove his red robe and toss it up to me. What happened to him then I couldn't say, for he became completely invisible.

## CHAPTER V

### The Custodian Melts Away

A MAN appeared on the roof with a folded flag under his arm, and I watched him send it to the top of the flagpole. It was an American flag containing only twelve stars. Was this the American republic or wasn't it?

I folded the skeleton's robe into a corner out of the wind, stuffed the pack of cards into my pocket, and trotted over to the man at the flagpole. Imagine Yours Truly, vintage of 1950, putting on his merriest mood with intent to tap this bird for some much needed information on this new world.

"Ah! Good morning, sir. A superfine spring morning, this. A little too much air-conditioning up here, but what's a little fresh air among friends?"

The man finished fastening the flagpole rope and turned a chilly stare on me.

"This reminds me," I continued, "of one morning in Cincinnati years ago. By the way, what is the exact mileage from h[illegible] Cincinnati?"

The fellow was scowling at my clothes. Maybe *he* thought *I* was overdressed. He looked to me like a half-dressed chicken, garbed as he was in a glorified undershirt and underpants with pockets.

"Where'd you come from?"

"Just dropped in. Excellent taxi service in these parts."

"Cincinnati is known for its fine taxi service."

"Cincinnati? *This* is Cincinnati?"

"And what did you think it was? Paris? See here, Mister, you're trespassing on private property. This roof isn't marked for taxi stops."

I snapped my fingers and nodded my head vigorously. "I knew it. That taxi-driver was a freak. Look at the bill he slipped me for change."

I handed an ordinary greenback, 1950 style, to this fellow, and you should have seen his eyes bulge. This was the right attack, no doubt about it.

"H-m-m. Quite a relic. But no value."

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"I was afraid of that."

"No, not worth a cent. You'd just as well throw it away. Here, I'll take it and dispose of it. I'm on my way to the incinerator. Keep Cincinnati clean, you know."

"I think I'll save it for a relic," I said, gauging the glow in this fellow's eye.

"I'll give you one redback for it."

"One *redback?*" I must have scowled dubiously, for he promptly raised the ante.

"Five redbacks," he said. "My son collects old coins and stuff . . . No. I won't raise it. The last of this American money was called in over a century ago. I remember that from my History of International Currency . . . No, I'm not claiming to be an educated man. I have only three degrees, but that qualifies me to be custodian of this building. . . History? Yes, I've had six courses—"

He kept his eye on the greenback as I quizzed him. I was striking a harder bargain than he knew.

"See here, I'm giving you this for five redbacks," I said. "But you'll have to show me the way down and tell me how to find the historical library—or any library—"

"This is irregular." Suspicion returned to the custodian's eyes. "I oughn't to overlook any trespassing. Especially when there's so much labor spying going on. Which library—"

"Any place where I can find some information on that man Flinders," I said. "You know, the James S. Flinders who wrote the radical editorial in 1950?"

"Never heard of him," said the custodian.

"You studied American history and you never heard of James S. Flinders and the Depression of 1950?"

"I remember reading of the Depression. But it was nothing compared with *this* one. And I never heard of anyone named Flinders. You'll probably have to go to the Bureau of Biographical Records in the Glass Capitol."

"That's all I wanted to know."

"Here's your five redbacks. Do I get that green bill?"

"Right." We made the exchange. "And now if you'll show me the way down—"

THE custodian was staring at the corner of the roof. A red robe was unfolding itself and filling out into the shape of a man. The shape but not the substance. The Lord of Temporary Death resumed visibility and approached with weird clattering footsteps.

"What's that?" the custodian gasped, turning deathly pale. "What kind of trick is this?"

"You've got me, brother," I whispered. "How's about leading me down? What's the matter? You paralyzed?"

In that instant I seemed to hover between two destinies. Would I escape Lord Temp and take my chances in this bright new world—a world that had forgiven and forgotten the bumptious and impulsive Jim Flinders of 1950?

Or would I stick with Lord Temp, to assist him with some strange game of spiritual manipulation upon these unsuspecting people?

In that split second of indecision, while the custodian stood open-mouthed and bug-eyed, and I weighed my destinies, it was the thundering of hoofs that tipped the scales.

I turned to see the four ghostly white horses racing onto the roof, with the jeweled chariot swinging after them.

Lord Temp leaped into the vehicle, jerking on the reins, and swung toward us.

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He picked me up, and off we went, flying into the air. We spiralled over the building and I threw a downward glance to see the custodian clinging to the flagpole for dear life. He screamed with terror.

"Great guns, *invaders!* . . . It's *invaders* from another planet! . . . *Help! Help!* . . ."

"Oh-oh," said Lord Temp. "We can't let any ugly rumors like that get started."

We turned back and spun past the shouting flag-raiser, and caught him just as he was making a bee-line for the stairs shrieking bloody murder.

Lord Temp gave a fling with his hand like throwing a gob of invisible mud, and that did it. The man's hair vanished, his eyebrows and his eyes and nose disappeared, his whole head melted away.

*It was a swift, strange transformation of a man into nothingness.*

Neck, shoulders, chest, arms — as swiftly as butter melts on a hot stove these melted away. The upper half of his clothes fell limp, his belt sagged, the hips of his trousers caved in, the whole outfit of empty clothing fell down over his shoes. He was gone—utterly gone. As the wind blew his empty clothing along over the roof I could see the last of his disappearance—socks collapsing within empty shoes.

"There," said the Lord of Temporary Death with a satisfied smile. "We've plugged that rumor for the present."

## CHAPTER VI

### Fifty Million in Misery

A HAPPIER skeleton than the Lord I never hope to see. His rows of teeth were wide apart with laughter, and his ribs were shaking.

"What did you kill him for?" My voice quivered with shock.

"Don't worry about him. He's just melted away temporarily."

"Melted to what?"

"To a sort of spirit with a suspended life."

"Another case of temporary death?"

"The real McCoy," said Lord Temp. "There are different forms, but this is the most convenient. I'm so clever at it I could work this on a large scale. And I will as soon as man learns to appreciate me."

"Just where did that custodian go when he passed out? Did he really melt into his shoes?"

"Ha, that's good, Flinders. It couldn't be more aptly described. He melted into his shoes! Actually, his spirit form probably mounted to the top of the flag pole. That's the way with our temporarily dead. They ascend to some convenient high place and there they rest until their time comes."

"Time for what, if I'm not too inquisitive?"

"To come back to normal life. In his case I'll give him only a few weeks of it. When I have a few minutes off I'll come back and talk his silly ideas out of his head. Meanwhile he'll be suspended in nothingness. Of course I could give him a new temporary body. He might feel a little better about it."

Lord Temp rubbed his red robe for a pair of binoculars and handed them to me. Then he gave a long swing with his arm as if lashing a team with a mile-long whip.

Through the binoculars I saw an eagle appear on the top of the flagpole. A very nervous eagle. Its talons slipped and it started to fall but suddenly discovered it could fly, and off it went like a shot.

Somehow I felt relieved. Then Lord Temp and I began talking and we got down to business.

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"I knew we would find pickings here, Flinders, my boy. The harvest is ready. I can hardly wait to get to work."

"Neither can I," I said solemnly. The indecision of a few seconds earlier had not relaxed its grip upon me. This new world beckoned to me. I was attracted as a small boy is attracted to a circus.

But the power of Lord Temp was something to reflect upon. Sailing through the clouds with him, listening to him unfold his plan, I could not help seeing my fellow mortals in a new light. Would they not prove to be a very helpless lot at the hands of this demon skeleton, the brother of the Prince of Death?

"Here," said the skeleton, handing me three or four more cards. "I didn't let anyone walk off with these. We will extend our survey over more territory before we start passing out literature. What, Flinders, have you learned of this new age?"

I turned the redback over in my hands.

"We have leaped through a century and a half," I began. "This is the year 2100 A.D. The world uses international currency. I have gathered a few sample one-dollar bills — redbacks. These were issued by the International Bank of Rio."

LORD TEMP was less interested in the money than in my reaction to it. I pointed out the tiny flags that formed the border. Obviously most of the nations I knew were still in existence. The flags of the United States, Great Britain, China and Russia—altered but recognizable — occupied the corner positions.

"I never use money," said the skeleton, "but I will pick up a supply for your use. Your job will be to make contacts with the influential people of this country and arrange conferences for me."

"And what is the big idea?"

"Have you discovered that this civilization is in the grip of a depression? And what a depression! I have traveled up and down the ages, and I have never bumped into a better one. Very promising, Flinders."

"Well, if there's anything we can do to relieve it—"

"Don't be simple, Flinders. We're going to capitalize on it. There are fifty million persons—workers and their families—who are utterly destitute."

"Fifty million? In *this* age?"

My head was swimming with images of beautiful architecture, swift, streamline traffic. Poverty in the midst of such wealth seemed impossible.

Lord Temp had fastened the reins on the chariot dash. Now he dropped the whip into its slot and sat back, propping his feet up. Those crazy horses, too, reacted in their own way, by showing a fresh burst of speed. My companion rubbed his hands together.

"Think of it, Flinders, fifty million contactees for temporary death. All we have to do is pull the right wires."

I watched the skeleton grin and I got a sickening feeling. With those soft, bunchy clouds passing along under us, I actually felt an impulse to jump overboard.

Lord Temp went right on talking glibly of the state of the nation. The United States had undergone some changes. For economic as well as political reasons the number of states had been reduced to twelve. Under this arrangement there was one major metropolis within each "regional" state, with transportation lines fanning outward toward all ends of the area. As I later learned the big cities had rid themselves of a lot of past grief by this arrangement. How many big cities

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used to overflow state lines?

No longer did you find half of a city being subject to one set of state laws because it was on the east side of a river, and the other half under a different state government because it was on the west side. The new boundaries had much more rhyme and reason to them, and a lot of complex and thankless work done by forty-eight separate state legislatures had been greatly simplified.

There were only twelve stars in the present flag. And instead of a congress packed with more public representatives than any well informed public could possibly keep track of, there were now only the twelve representatives—"Goldfish"—one from each regional state. These were the famous Council of Twelve at the head of the government. They and their "executive secretary," who was chosen from the nation at large but could vote only in case of tie, were responsible for keeping the U.S.A. in a healthy state.

IN SOME ways it sounded like a good scheme. There was little chance for any Council member to loaf on the job. The twelve "Goldfish" and their executive secretary were always under the spotlight. If they were good conscientious men the country ran smoothly; if they were political shysters, their vast powers could roll the nation right down the hill and over the brink of disaster.

Lord Temp pondered this arrangement and from the way he rubbed his ivory hands together must have contemplated a nice juicy disaster.

"These times are ripe for revamping men's souls," he grinned. "Stay with me, Flin. We'll make spiritual history."

Lord Temp turned his yellow skull toward me and again his hollow eyes seemed to be winking.

"Why so silent, Flinders?"

"I suppose this question is out of order," I said, "but could you see your way to give those fifty million persons life? Not merely a dreary existence, but some honest-to-goodness living."

"None of that sabotage, Flinders. Maybe you don't realize that we are about to make the first original contribution to man's existence in a million years. You realize that I am the brother of the Prince of Death. This plan is my special *appanage*. I have searched the ages for the most favorable time. Your space-ship did not strike this century by chance. I rode it down."

I had suspected as much. I made no comment. My own thoughts were frightening. Would I hire out to do murder? This diabolical plan sounded like a dozen wars and a century of murders all rolled into one package.

"What does man's cycle consist of?" the misanthrope beside me went on. "Birth—life—death. There you have it in a nutshell. I will revolutionize that cycle by contributing temporary death. Eh, Flinders?"

"I still don't understand your plan."

"Tonight you will see more. Keep your eyes open for huge bonfires burning on the hillsides."

Bonfires? We sighted thousands of them in the weeks that followed. They were the mass meetings of hungry men and women who gathered to talk over their grievances.

Often we would attend these meetings from a safe distance and listen to the speeches and hard luck stories and reports on the latest waves of technological unemployment.

These were laborers, all. They had helped to build the fine, comfortable civilization that spread over this land. But they had built too well. Their durable automatic machinery had replaced *them*, thousands at a time.

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We heard them speak in public auditoriums, pleading with local authorities for a fair hearing. We saw squads of officers break up their meetings and disperse their street-corner throngs.

Talk about depression! My sympathies welled up like a balloon. But the effects of these visits on Lord Temp were a bit more complicated. The more misery he saw the more he rubbed his rattling palms in glee.

"This is the ideal age, the choice decade, the pick of all the years," he would say. "Friend Flinders, we're going to have ourselves a fling."

THEN one week I found myself alone. My calcareous master had taken leave for a few weeks or months —but he promised me he'd be back before long. (His brother, the Prince of Death, needed help handling a pestilence back in the Middle Ages.) Could I get along in this new world alone now?

"I'm able bodied," I said. "I'll take my chances."

"Don't circulate my cards too freely till you know our way around."

I could have buried his cards gladly. I didn't like the lump they made in my hip pocket, and my clothes were conspicuous enough without them.

Lord Temp swung his whip over the four white horses and sailed off into the sky, and at once I found myself very much down to earth.

I had a fair supply of redbacks, but I decided I'd better hold onto them. They made my left hip pocket balance my right. A job, nothing less, would give me security. I sallied forth with the brisk step and confident eye that I used to recommend so heartily in my editorials to every down-and-outer.

I thought I knew all about unemployment.

I thought my heart was attuned to the awfulness of want and misery. I thought my past equipped me as the perfect sounding-board for the masses of hopeless, jobless canaille who were inevitably a drag on the national economy during a depression.

But at last I was to go through those terrifying, morbid experiences myself, and my new sensations were to make the old vicarious ones counterfeit in comparison.

I was looking for work, I a stranger in a strange land.

What had been beauty to me in this fresh new world now became a beauty of mockery. The great buildings turned their cold shoulders toward me, and when I trudged in their shadows they breathed an icy breath upon me.

"THIS WAY IN. WE HAVE THE VERY JOB FOR YOU."

How those signs on the employment agency doors mocked me . . . me and millions of others. At some doors long lines of shuffling ragged men would wait for hours, all held by that amaranthine spark within man's breast called hope. Eventually four or five would be cornered for further interviews, and finally the best three of them would be notified that one job was waiting—*for the one that reached it first.*

Away they would race, like three starved greyhounds. From the window you could see them dash through traffic, risking life and limb to catch the passing public conveyance.

Perhaps an officer would collar them, snarl something about breakneck speed, and those with the swift start would lose the race.

Once I saw two men flattened by a rush of oncoming traffic. I thought of Lord Temp and his strange theories—that persons under too much pressure become reckless of life and hurl themselves into the path of death—purposefully (though their conscious thoughts

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might never admit this was the case).

My own great difficulty was that I could never establish my identity satisfactorily. Most of the citizens of this age, employed or otherwise, carried cards that gave them government classifications of various kinds: a registration card with vital statistics; an employment card with a work record; a health card indicating physical examinations, vaccinations, etc., required for public welfare.

I HAD no cards, and in one instance I decided to rely upon the truth and admit that I was a visitor from the year 1950. The employment agent was in a bad mood, and his impatience with all unemployed came bouncing down on me like a ton of bricks.

"You've no business here if you haven't kept your work card up to date. If you've lost it, you ought to have sense enough to get a new one before you enter my door."

He pounded his desk with both fists at once.

"Sorry. What are the damages?" I got out my handsome roll of bills and started counting out redbacks, five at a time. He was impressed just enough to restrain himself from throwing me out.

"Maybe you don't need a job," he said sarcastically. "You seem to be in the dough."

"It was given to me. I don't like to spend what I don't earn."

"Where'd you steal that wad?"

"I didn't steal it. If you must know, a skeleton gave it to me. Maybe he stole it—"

"Ugh!" The agent paced back and forth studying my face in the different lights. Then he picked up the telephone. "Get me the state hospital, Bertha, and see that the doors are locked. . . . No, he's not violent—not so far—"

I biffed him and handed him his mirror off the office wall so he could see what was happening under his eye. Then I walked out.

Bertha, the receptionist, had left the switchboard in a frenzy and was screaming for Frank Wurzichski or someone to come and guard the door. When she turned and saw me sauntering out of the elevator, I thought she was going to faint.

I put on an act. I laughed as if I were the biggest practical joker in the world, and went straight to her telephone desk and pretended to hold an uproarious conversation with the agent, whose eye I had just blackened.

"You win the ten, J.P. She fell for it, just as you said she would. Yeah, in another minute she'd have had the door bolted and guarded with ray guns. . . . Okay, J.P., I'll tell her it was just a hoax. All right, we'll recommend her for a raise, since you insist."

I hung up.

"Just a hoax!" she gasped. "Thank Goodness! I thought you were really mad!"

"I manage to get along," I laughed, and favoring her and the bewildered doorman with a wink apiece, I left.

## CHAPTER VII

### I Dream of Sally

NOR was that the only time that I was closely shaved with the charge of being an escaped something-or-other. Passports were all too important in this realm, and I was forever being reminded of my lack of credentials.

We'll skip some weeks of downright misery, when hunger and cold and mental depression began to swallow me up.

We'll pass over my mad ambition to prove my stamina equal to that of those broke, hungry guys who became my pals.

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We'll pass over my several attempts to forget that I had redbacks in my pocket and to make my way with my hands. Whenever hunger hit me I failed miserably at becoming a buoyant spirit among downhearted men.

It was only after I'd steal away from the streets full of homeless down-and-outers and get a square meal under my belt that I could come back to these lads and say, "Don't be down in the mouth, boys. It's all psychological. You're a helluva lot better off than you think you are. Look at me. I can still smile. You guys can too. Maybe there's a job around the corner."

(Some weak voice piped back that he was too low ever to get around the corner.)

Well, you can imagine what happened to me and my dough under these conditions. I began taking my pals and their families out for food on the sly. Give 'em a little food, and what would happen? They'd steam up with hope and come back to their gang and start talking things up.

"If we could get pepped up once, boys, we might stage a revolution. Isn't that right, Flinders?"

"Dangerous business, but you've sure as hell got to do something."

"Nothing short of revolution will bring those wafflebottoms in the Government up on their toes. They don't care if we starve. But if we'd stage a hunger march on the Glass Capitol and tell them they've got to give us a share of the world's work—"

"Sh-s-s-sh. They've got coppers scattered round among us, like as not."

"Sure. You never know who's planted. It might even be the guy that talks loudest for revolution."

With this comment the fellows began to look around suspiciously at one another, and a lot of eyes began drilling me, since I was one of these newest floaters in this run-down end of the city.

But the fellows I'd fed stuck up for me; they said nobody dared accuse me of being anything less than a good revolutionist.

"Flinders is for us a hundred percent."

"Damn right," I said. "I've been waiting for you for a hundred and fifty years—no kidding."

But the old conflicts were welling up in me as never before. Three forces were tugging at me.

Out of friendship for these birds I wanted to say to myself, "Okay, Jim Flinders, pitch in and help these helpless millions put over an A-1 revolution to win the better living they deserve."

But the choke-hold that diabolical Lord of Temporary Death had on me was squeezing out something like this: "Have a fling at playing God, Flinders. Here's a rare opportunity to see how the human race will react to an experimental something as potent as birth and death. Here are your guinea pigs—these unrooted masses of destitute people. Apply a vast wave of temporary death to them. See what happens. The worst you can do is relieve them of their present misery."

And there was still a third side to my conflict—this spark that kept burning at the edge of my conscience. It was something Sally had planted in my protean morality: "Jim Flinders, get away from this trouble. You'll only make more. You turned misery into a cruel joke once before. If you had listened to me everything would have been different. We could have been so happy, Jim."

BETWEEN the first two forces I hung helplessly like a calf caught in a tug-of-war rope.

To the third tug, the still small voice, I tried to give argument: "But Sally,

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that's all past now. I've lost you. You've had your life without me—and I hope it was a happy one. Now everything's different. I'm a visitor in this new world—"

"You needn't be," my memory of Sally would seem to answer me. "You still have most of your life to live. Find work, join another business club, fall in love with another girl—"

"Wait a minute. I can't even find work."

"You haven't used your head. You're an expert in one particular line—or don't you realize it?"

"If you mean newspaper work, that's out."

"You're a historical expert."

"Me? Historical—?"

"What you know about the events of 1950 would fill many a book. You're the only historian in existence with a first hand knowledge of 1950."

"Ugh! (Gulp) I never thought of that."

"All right, think about it. And wipe that frown off your face."

"The trouble is, when I get to thinking about that age I'm nettled by those little things I left undone. Look—I'm still carrying a telephone bill I left unpaid."

"Go into some telephone office and pay it, by all means, and get it off your mind. It's time for you to get busy and live in your new century. That's all. Good luck, Jim."

"Betty—!"

This conversation within the dusty interstices of my brain took place as I was waking out of a long and soothing night's sleep on an old overcoat in someone's open storeroom with rats running over my legs.

I awoke on fire, with ambitions that echoed the old days when Sally and I were building air-castles.

All right, I'd go to the first telephone office and ask how to pay this old bill. And then I'd make an all-out effort to find a niche for myself as an expert on the national history of the period from 1925 to 1950.

I unfolded the worn envelope, slit it open, looked for the bad news.

What's this? It wasn't a bill, after all. It was a note—

A note from Sally!

"Dearest Jim:

This is to notify you that I can't meet you tonight at Twelfth and Main. You know I've been threatening to get a new job, with everything so uncertain. Well, I've just this minute started working in the telephone office, and I'm feeling happier about everything already. I do love you, Jim, and as soon as we can get a little money ahead, I'm going to marry you. Poor Hobbie! Can't you just picture him—waiting on the corner of Eleventh and Main tonight while we go out and celebrate?

With love, and love, and love,
Ever yours,
SALLY."

I read it seventeen times, and sopped the tears off my cheeks and folded it into my pocket next to my heart. You needn't try to understand why, but for some reason a lovely dreamy mood enveloped me and I lay down on the old tattered overcoat on the storeroom floor, and told the rats to go ahead and chase over—but gently, gently.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Another Sally

"WE'VE been looking for an expert in that particular period of history, Mr. Flinders," said the employment agent. "I'm sure you can land the job if you'll send your application to this address, at the Glass Capitol, without delay."

"Will I have to go there? I'm a little short on carfare."

"Suppose you leave the arrangements to this agency. I'll get an advance for

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you. If I'm not mistaken, this family is very wealthy. You know, a good government position, the aristocratic residential section, interest in unearthing long-lost family history: it all has the sound of affluence."

"Thank you, sir. While I don't claim to be an expert in genealogy, I'll do my best."

"Remember what I said, Flinders. Don't be hesitant about inventing a few facts and figures and colorful details beyond the existing records. You're on safe ground. No one from the past is ever going to come along to dispute you."

"I can depend on that?"

"Facetious again, Mr. Flinders? But you catch the idea, I'm sure. What did you say the population was in 1950? You mentioned a day in June."

"One hundred fifty-five million, two hundred twenty-two, exclusive of infants and the day's turnover in births and deaths. And a very warm day it was, incidentally. A helluva hot day. Surprising there weren't more deaths —"

"You'll do, Flinders. You've got the idea. I'll have you on your way to the Glass Capitol within twenty-four hours.

* * * * *

THAT night I flew west, feeling as if I belonged to this new age at last. If everything went well, the job might last all of two months.

All through that swift night flight I slept not a wink. Now and then I could see bright bonfires on hillsides eight miles below, and I felt the tightening of my bonds with those horny-handed sons of toil, gathering in miserable jungles to share their degradation.

Nor did I forget to watch the black clouds through which we skimmed. Where was the Lord of Temporary Death? How did I know his white horses might not come galloping up alongside the plane? How powerless I would be if he should blast a patch of wall away and lift me out of my seat!

Then I would contemplate the tranquil sky and the stars and wonder: Could the spirit of Sally be up there somewhere? That spirit must be smiling with approval, I thought, if it could know that I was not the apostate I had once seemed to be; that I was starting life afresh.

The Glass Capitol was a magnificent city.

All the genius of man's planning had gone into it, and every circular street and triangular block was an indispensable part of the well integrated whole.

AT THE sleepy hour of three in the morning we descended upon this vast wheel-shaped city at the foot of the Rockies. From overhead it looked as if some hidden geyser might have gushed forth a million luminous diamonds, and as we spiralled down we had the thrill of watching these million dots of light spread out into a fantastic pattern of concentric tires and evenly spaced spokes—the arterial traffic ways. Even at this hour these avenues were alive with multiple streams of vehicle lights.

If the whole pattern as seen from the air might be described as an immense electrical pie cut into eight pieces, two of those pieces were missing—a fourth of the pie. In this space a smaller electrical pie fitted very neatly, and the crisscrossing of beacons and floodlights revealed this to be an immense airport.

As I later discovered, this fourth of the city embraced not only air terminals but all of the major lines of transportation: rail, bus and continent-to-continent rocket. The advantage of the layout was something to consider: All public passenger traffic was handled through a single gigantic terminal, lo-

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cated very near the center of the city.

That blazing heap of diamonds right in the center of this whole pattern—the electrical hub itself—was the seat of the American Government. Although I didn't realize it at this first glimpse, that immense circular plateau was one vast building, and all those gleaming little nodules which covered it were the separate glass houses on its roof—penthouse temples, if you please—which were the glass sanctums of the various high government officials.

As I later learned, these glass domes were popularly called "goldfish bowls"—and no one ever told you the name without adding that the idea back of them was political honesty: it was believed that all government officials would benefit by these daily reminders that the public liked to know what was going on. All around and above them the eyes of the nation were continually passing.

I'll never forget the embarrassment I suffered the moment I entered the home of the Honorable Prescott Barnes, my employer.

Aside from being a bit sleepy I was in complete possession of my faculties, such as they were, and was all set to make a good impression. That is, I had that well dressed and well scrubbed feeling of the small boy who starts off to Sunday-school darned sure that he's going to make a hit with the teacher.

I had, in fact, taken myself to one of those all-round service shops immediately after a quick breakfast at the airport. Any person of the year 2100 can appreciate what a thorough going-over those top-to-toe shops offered: bath, shave, hairtrim, manicure, throat spray, tooth examination, press, shine, and so on. Filling station attendants of my time had nothing on these service-shop lads.

The butler ushered me into the light, streamlined living-room. Bookcases formed pyramids in the corners, and three or four bright musical instruments surrounded the big orchid-tinted grand piano. The wide mantel over the fireplace was adorned with a few well placed photographs and a couple of busts.

There was the Honorable Prescott Barnes himself waiting to greet me, but all I saw was *one picture on the mantel.*

LIKE some weird mechanical doll with only one word and the single expression of amazed gasping, I stood there saying, "Sally . . . Sally . . . Sally!"

I was half aware that the Honorable Barnes was alarmed at my conduct, but there was nothing I could do about it. *That picture was Sally Hart over and over,* and all at once my brain was in a dreadful whirl, and my sense of time spun like a clock crossed with a roulette wheel.

I heard the butler say to His Honor, "Have I made a mistake, sir? I thought this was the gentleman you expected. But it would seem this must be one of the several boy friends afflicted with the malady we have previously discussed, sir. I refer to love-sickness, sir. These symptoms, I should say, are rather too pronounced. Shall I remove him, sir?"

The baffled Barnes stood stroking his sharp gray mustache, squinting his cold gray eyes at me, I was sure—though, as you must understand, I was too much enveloped in this discovery of a likeness to Sally Hart to pay any attention to him.

The Honorable Barnes cleared his throat. To the butler he said, "The agent warned me that I'd find this man a trifle peculiar, but not *this* peculiar. Call Sally."

Sally breezed in—not *my* Sally, of course, but the gorgeous *Sally Barnes,*

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a girl of nineteen or twenty, in an abbreviated green gabardine sports outfit that displayed her tanned arms and legs. She had those same gray-blue eyes, capable of conveying silent accusations. I know my jaw dropped and I stared and my face reddened. Being utterly helpless, I mumbled, "You—you're not quite Sally!"

"Certainly I don't know this man," Sally Barnes said. "Should I? If there's nothing else, Father, I have a date with Leon King." Sally turned sharply and, with a slight twitch of haughtiness in her shoulders, walked out.

"She has a date with your office boy, Mr. Barnes," said the butler skeptically.

The Honorable Barnes made short work of me. He was sorry to say that his day was packed with conferences until late this afternoon. At five-thirty I might stop at his goldfish bowl over the government house and he would line me up on some work. Would I leave my card and new temporary address?

Six hours of strolling around the city. I might have been on the razor edge of interest if I had entered this place as a tourist.

But that picture—the uncanny resemblance had shot me through with indescribable acicula, and I wandered about with sensations of a patient under anaethesia.

The vast plaza which was the roof-garden over the Government House was the magnetic center toward which all floaters gravitate, be they pedestrians, motorists or fliers.

I started to count the number of shining round glass temples, when that old familiar "Flin-n-n-n-ders" rattled in my ear like a vibrating suitcase handle.

"Lord Temp! Where'd you come from? I never expected to see you here in broad daylight."

"Glad to see me, aren't you, friend?" The robed skeleton sat down beside me. He was smiling for all he was worth and he gave me a few hearty slaps on the back—slaps that dripped with little showers of sparks, reminding me that I was in the presence of potential power in unknown quantities.

If I had answered truthfully, I'd have said, "There's no one in the world that I'm more eager *no*: to see than you this particular afternoon."

But I was discreet enough to say nothing. He rambled on:

"You're in fine fettle. You've changed your modus vivendi considerably since I saw you last, Flinders. You could pass for a native. That's fine. You'll be useful. Have there been any good clashes between the hungry rabble and their masters since I saw you last? Oh-oh, here come some sightseers. I'd better do away with this robe."

HE FOLDED the red garment into a small pack and allowed me to sit on it. In his invisible state he continued to talk with me. We had a long conversation over the state of the nation, and from Lord Temp's point of view there was no doubt about it; things looked very good. The hungry rabble, as he called them, were ripe for picking.

I could have told him another side if he hadn't been too talkative to listen. Yes, I was thinking of those pals of mine in dirty crowded streets who were beginning to stir out of their degradation.

I thought of the families I had shared my dinners with, and the new fire that had come to their hearts as soon as food filled their stomachs.

I recalled one Bobby Hammock who had been ill from malnutrition until some of the idle men stole some milk

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and force-fed him. That was a queer case. Those lads never told Bobby Hammock where they got that milk or he'd never have touched it. He'd have died first. A kid with lots of principle —too much for his own good, according to my standards.

I'd write to Hammock sometime, or try to look him up, I thought. (If Lord Temp had guessed my thoughts he might have snapped me out of existence with his electric fingertips.) But that was a devil of a jam I'd got myself into, tying up with these miserable unemployed at the very time I was supposed to be plotting to dispatch them.

"This isn't a good place for me to meet you, friend Flinders," said the skeleton.

"Where do you suggest?"

"Over on the mountain side of town in a five-acre ranch back of an Indiana limestone mansion, there's an outcropping of red crags about three hundred feet high. They slant up through the mountain-side like three big earth-red dinner plates with a couple of forks between them—sprangling dead trees. It's the sort of place where my horses like to land. The brats—always trying to bounce me out of the chariot."

"I may be able to find it."

"I'll meet you there any Saturday night I'm not too busy eleswhere. But don't wait for me after one a.m. Okay, Flinders—still have plenty of cards?"

"All you gave me."

"That's good. Have you made any contacts with government officials?"

"One. Start to work for him this afternoon."

"Ideal. Our rabble are ripe, but we've got to be sure the Government won't make trouble for us."

"Wait a minute. Do I understand that we're going to blot out a few million people *with* the knowledge and consent of the Government?"

"A smart lobby can get away with anything. Before we give these fifty million their nightcaps the Government is going to approve, and so are the fifty million. But it won't be easy. Our angle, is to figure things out so that every faction gets what it wants."

With that the Lord of Temporary Death picked up his robe, leaped for the passing chariot and swished away.

I didn't see how in the name of death and magic I could possibly go to the appointed Goldfish Bowl and look the Honorable Barnes in the eye with this death scheme swimming in one half of my brain and my thoughts of Sally in the other half. But it was nearly four o'clock, so I girded my loins and went forth.

## CHAPTER IX

### Bobbie Hammock's Blonde

AT THE arched glass entrance to Barnes' Goldfish Bowl I stopped short. A ragged young man was coming out and *I knew him.* His quick movements, his rather short stature, his muscular shoulders, the very brown plaid on the elbows of his tattered gray shirt were perfectly familiar. And that determined glint in his keen boyish eyes —I could never mistake that.

"Bobbie Hammock!" I whirled on him and it was obvious that I gave him a shocking surprise.

"Huh? How did you know—*Oh, Flinders!* Well! Small world, isn't it? Say, you've dressed up since I saw you."

"I struck a vein of work—I think."

I glanced to the wide curved window of the Goldfish Bowl through which the Honorable Prescott Barnes was watching me. I knew I had no time to waste standing here talking. "I've got to see you, Bobbie."

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"Sure, Flinders. Come to the jungle two miles east of City Limits on Victory Street. You'll probably find me locking horns with Hefty the Ramrod. Ask for him, but don't confide in him."

"Okay. I'll see you."

"By the way, Flinders, if you're about to chew the rag with the Honorable Prescott Barnes, I'll give you a tip. He's straight and level-headed and on our side," said Bobbie Hammock. "If you're working to head off a revolution, *count on him.* He stacks up right along with Marble."

"Marble?"

"Verle Marble, the Executive Secretary, you know, the finest brain in the country."

I wondered at once how well Bobbie Hammock knew my employer, but he dodged any further questions about the Honorable Barnes, dropping only one more remark.

"Barnes is wise and solid, but he likes to hand out personal advice. He just now ordered me to get out of these ragged clothes and get a job. But why should I when my friends can't? See you later, Flinders."

I pushed through the revolving glass door to run the gauntlet of a battery of receptionists and secretaries, at length to find myself in a waiting-room adjoining the Honorable Barnes' sanctum. Wise and solid? He looked it, now that there was no reminder of Sally to take my eyes off him.

I was given a sheaf of instructions and told to go to work at once. I started off.

"One moment, Mr. Flinders." Barnes cool gray eyes searched me. "You were talking with a young man outside my door. Where did you meet him?"

"In one of the eastern cities—the suburbs." I wondered if Barnes interpreted "suburbs" to mean the jungles of the unemployed. To my surprise he handed me a packet of redbacks.

"Expense money, Mr. Flinders. You may require an assistant in this research. Possibly some friend in need of a job."

"Such as that fellow Hammock?"

"Er—I'll leave that to your judgment," said Barnes. He was nodding slightly. Then with an amused laugh, "What did you call him—Hammock?"

"Bobbie Hammock. That's his name."

PRESCOTT BARNES suppressed his smile. "If you should employ this Mr. Hammock, you needn't mention that the suggestion came from me."

That was that.

I went to work in the Bureau of Biographical Records the next morning.

That night I paid a visit to the village of the underfed, a jungle that extended eastward from the edge of the city. But I failed to make contact with Bobbie Hammock. For two or three successive nights I missed him. But this was not surprising in so large and badly organized a village. The none-too-popular leader, Hefty the Ramrod, was off on a tour of inspection to other boiling pots of revolution, and in his absence this group had broken down into quarreling factions.

I would have to find Bobbie later.

Meanwhile, my regular work hours brought back a little of that long-lost feeling of being a part of the world about me.

Except for its extreme speed, this capital city was an attractive place. After half a week of riding those swift public conveyances I began to get the hang of those high-powered speed-up platforms.

You had to cross from a narrow stationary platform to a narrower moving

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one, and thence to another moving at higher speed, and by the time you crossed a series of these you could step right into the open door of the passing train, no stop being necessary.

It took me several weeks before I lost all my old habit of wanting to pay a fare. Here your monthly taxes took care of a multitude of evils. It was much too important to the welfare of the city to keep people moving swiftly, to slow up the process by collecting individual fares.

In some ways this speed was less objectionable than that of 1950. There were neither noise nor crowded conditions on these public trains. But, by gollies, there can be "damn too much speed"—as old Mixy Metaphore on the Mercury used to say. You never had enough time to relax coming or going—which time I sorely needed.

I got a letter from Bobbie toward the end of my first week of work. The news had reached him that I hoped to hire him, and he replied that he would talk with me soon.

"First I must see some of these boys through a little patch of trouble," he wrote.

I didn't like the sound of that. Ominous things were brewing outside the city limits. Out of curiosity I made another trip to try to locate Bobbie.

"Why the hell is everyone lookin' for Bobbie Hammock?" the bird on guard duty said as he let me through. "There was a starry-eyed blonde chasin' after him not five minutes ago."

I hurried along through the twisted avenues of campfires and cardboard houses, ignoring the suspicious looks and epithets that my good clothes evoked.

Presently I caught up with the blonde.

"Hello! You're looking for Bobbie Hammock, too? I'm Jim Flinders. I met him back East. Bumped into him here the other day."

"I'm Lucille Boyington," said the blonde, and kept right on walking. The gateman's description hadn't done her justice. Those eyes he had called "starry" showed terror in the light of passing campfires. If she was "chasin' after" Bobbie it was to warn him of danger.

AS WE threaded our way through the dark, shadowy jungle streets she explained. "That mad Hefty is threatening to throw monkey-wrenches. We ought to push him off his throne."

"What's up?"

"He's got the South Side Jungle all stirred up ready to march on the Capitol whenever he says the word."

"You sure of this? I talked with Bobby the other day—"

"Bobbie doesn't know. That's why I've got to find him. He can do more than anyone to head it off." Lucille Boyington said it proudly.

"How'd you get next to this?"

"My parents live in the South Side Jungle," said Lucille. "Hefty has done some underhand organizing there, especially among those restless newcomers that haven't learned to take it. They don't realize how much they'll hurt their own cause if they go off half-cocked."

"M-m-m-m. From what I hear of Hefty the Ramrod he's an impatient sort."

"Too reckless to be a leader," she said.

I was beginning to like this girl. She was from the jungles of the underfed, there was no denying that. Her low-pitched voice was filled with a tragic quality that made you wonder. Strangely, her face was pretty, her eyes gleaming and childlike—full red lips. She could hardly have been more than

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seventeen. And yet you were somehow sure she knew her own mind, that she possessed extraordinary strength and determination.

"Are you related to Bobbie Hammock?"

"No, just a friend," said the girl.

Our trek came to a surprise halt when the campfires revealed some faces that Lucille recognized. Here were two or three families that she had known previously and they were ready to help her. Two of the older men bolted off toward the end of camp where Hefty the Ramrod was thought to be holding conferences. We waited.

The news of Lucille's warning must have grapevined rapidly across the underfed village, for we could soon hear the low jumble of voices rising into the sharpened pitch of excitement. We gathered that there was some hard-boiled resentment toward the Ramrod for trying to pull off this premature march. But on the other hand, the scheme was sure to catch fire among many.

By two o'clock that night the talk quieted. Our friends returned to us, bringing Bobbie with them. We stirred the red coals and drank strong coffee and talked up our reassurances that trouble had been averted.

"It's hard to tell what the Ramrod's planning," said Bobbie. "But thanks to your warning, they've but him out of circulation for tonight."

"How?" Lucille was skeptical. But Bobbie's reply made her smile.

"They dragged him into a game." Bobbie's eyes showed the gleam of mischief-making. "Any time you can get him deep enough in cards that he freezes his face, with one bristling eyebrow up and the other down, you've restored peace over the jungle. He forgets his ambitions. That gives his lieutenants time to cool off, and the people are kept out of trouble."

"Frozen eyebrows — symbol of peace," said Lucille slowly. "I wonder—"

"Some day someone'll knock his eyebrows off," Bobbie mused, "and then where'll we be?"

"In the biggest dogfight you ever saw," said the starry-eyed blonde.

## CHAPTER X

### Service for Suicides

BOBBY HAMMOCK and Lucille walked back with me to the city limits as gray dawn softened the shabby village scene.

I proposed to Bobby that he come to work for me. But he was too much afire with the destinies of downtrodden millions.

And that wasn't all. Just now those starry eyes and pretty red lips were exerting a powerful tug on his will. I didn't press my request.

"Sometime there'll be a revolution," said Lucille. "After that we can think of our own comforts—jobs, security, homes."

"And you, Bobbie—do you believe in revolution?" I asked.

"Only as a last resort."

My instincts told me that Bobbie Hammock was no native of these underfed jungles. At some time he must have known high living standards. But his heart and soul were certainly wrapped up in Lucille Boyington and her people.

"Maybe all our best-laid plans will be upset," I suggested, thinking of Lord Temp. "Maybe some unforeseen catastrophe is ahead."

"Starvation is ahead," said Bobbie Hammock bitterly. "Three avenues are open:

"One: The unselfish men in the gov-

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ernment may finally succeed with their plan to give us a chance to work again and eat again . . . But I doubt it.

"Two: Our jumpy radicals may start some premature fireworks and the government will pitch in and cook our goose.

"Three: We fifty million may organize and stage a swift, almost bloodless revolution. This would give us the government."

"And probably prove to us that we don't know what to do with it," Lucille commented.

"Good morning, friends, and happier dreams some other night," I said.

Three avenues? No, four. The fourth was the one I was walking on. Victory Street. It led straight west across the city toward the red crags—the three giant dinner plates at the base of the mountains.

AFTER a full Saturday of work I wended my way westward. Highway lights and the silhouettes of forbidding mountain peaks against the stars guided my feet toward the appointed spot.

"What kept you so long?" the skeleton asked, grinding his bare teeth as if he meant to bite me. "I had an interesting lesson in temporary death lined up for you, but you didn't arrive so I postponed it."

"Very sorry, but don't miss any fun on my account. I'm down to earth now, you know, rubbing elbows with civilization—"

"Aha! You think you're out of the mood to appreciate death! You should have seen the good work my brother and I just cleaned up in that plague in the Middle Ages. But come, the night's young. We'll still manage to see a few sights."

As if in response to his will, the four white horses came pounding down the inclined surface of rock. The chariot wheeled up to us. Lord Temp tossed me in and caught the reins as he leaped in beside me.

We bounded over the sprangling dead branches that crowned the crags, we circled back over the Indiana limestone mansion, whose side windows glowed with purple light. We rose high above it, and the trickle of midnight traffic to and from its driveway became lost among the million luminous diamonds.

We galloped under a low cloud and raced down toward a broad highway bordered by amber floodlights. The car we descended upon was zigzagging across the road at high speed and it was an easy guess that the driver was intoxicated. Through the transparent top we could see him. His face showed in the glow of the dash lights, a contorted and painful looking countenance indeed.

I thought he would surely crack into the cupped banks and turn himself over before we got to make anything of him. But Lord Temp thought otherwise.

"Notice he isn't quite letting go. Moreover, he isn't drunk. He's in a state of blind rage about something. I think you'll find him an interesting study."

"I'll find him—what do I have to do with him?"

"I'll drop you into the seat beside him. I'll leave my robe in the chariot, so he won't see me, and I'll crawl into the rear seat."

"So we'll all three crash."

"If there's a crash, don't worry. I don't think he'll be quite reckless enough to crash. Mark my words, *he thinks he wants to get killed accidentally*. But he doesn't. No, Flinders, what he really wants is temporary death."

A moment later I found myself sitting in the front seat with this reckless

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driver turning his twisted and angry face in my direction. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the streak of white like a wisp of cloud, and I knew the horses and chariot were off for an exercise spree. I trusted that Lord Temp was here with me.

"I don't know when you got in here," the man growled at me, "but if you're smart you'll get out. This car isn't right. The steering gear's busted."

"Why don't you stop, you fool?"

" 'Cause I'm in a hurry, that's why."

"Then let me take the wheel. You're in no mood to be driving."

"Let me alone. I know what I'm doing."

"You're trying to kill yourself," I said. "Anyway, you think you are. What's your trouble?"

HIS face twitched with fury and his head shook a refusal to talk. Then he stared at me until I recoiled—not from the stare but from the swerve of the car toward the cupped bank. But he drew down on the wheel just in time to avert disaster. Mechanically he was taking care of his safety even though his consciousness seemed bent on self-destruction.

"I'll tell you why I'm heading for a crash." His voice stiffened into a low mutter. "I can't go home. I can't face my wife and kids and mother-in-law and those two harping old aunts. I can't do it. They've been warning me I'd lose my job, and they've made life a hell for me over it already. Now—"

"Oh, so you've lost your job?"

"It wasn't my fault. They're throwin' more off every day. My turn had to come. And where's a fellow gonna get any more work, with fifty million already out in the cold? We're just one big human scrap heap."

"Hell, man, you can't be whipped on your first layoff."

"First and last," he said bitterly.

There was no use talking to the fellow. My only advice to him was to take a vacation from everything and everybody for a couple of weeks to cool off and rest up. But he said that was impossible.

"I won't give those two old aunts the satisfaction of jumping on me," he said. "Damn 'em, they've sponged on us for five years, and yow-yowed and bickered and stewed about the poverty we're gettin' into. And now that the worst has happened, I'm telling you, fellow, I'd not be able to take one more word offa them. Hell, I'd throw 'em out bodily.—"

"Might not be a bad idea."

"Only I might lose control of myself and fire a revolver—no, no, no. That won't do. The simplest way out is just to have a smash-up with the car. Kill myself, then let them draw their own conclusions."

"Oh, I see. You believe these aunts would think it over and realize that they were partly responsible."

"Sure they would. My blood would be on their hands."

"You're killing yourself to get revenge."

"To put it bluntly, they're murdering me. They've already hounded me to death. This is just the final crash."

*"Look out!"* I thought we were gone for sure that time, but this madman wasn't quite ready to die. He was getting too much satisfaction out of imagining the aftermath of his death. But there was something in the back of his mind, as Lord Temp pointed out to me afterward, that kept telling him his enjoyment of this revenge upon aunts and friends and family would end very abruptly the instant he cashed in.

"Don't you wish," I asked, "that

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there was such a thing as *temporary* death?"

"I sure as hell do."

At that moment Lord Temp's rasping whisper sounded at my off ear. "Give him a card."

"Here," I said to the man. "Here's an invitation to Temporary Death. Take three or four cards while you're at it. Any time you find a friend going through what you're going through, give him one of these."

The man stuck the cards up in the windshield without examining them closely. "What the devil are they?"

"Invitations," Lord Temp whispered to me.

"Invitations," I repeated. "Invitations to Temporary Death."

"I accept," said the man in the same reckless spirit that he might have bet his life on a sure loser at the races. "Now what do I do?"

The invisible Lord Temp spoke aloud. "I'll be there ready to pick you up at the right moment."

"And who are you?" the man asked, gaping around and seeing no one.

"I am Temporary Death."

Then Lord Temp and I flew off in the chariot, and the man shot on down the road as straight as an arrow.

## CHAPTER XI

### Legend of a Nameless Man

THIS Leon King, who had fastened himself upon Prescott Barnes, as wastebasket boy and office prodigy, was also doing his best to impress Barnes' fair daughter. He was a sharp-nosed, sharp-tongued kid of twenty who was too egotistical ever to smile at anything less than his own jokes. Jealousy aside, I still wouldn't have liked him. He reminded me of Hobbledehoy.

Consequently I got a kick out of it that morning when Sally sent him merrily on his way.

She had come to the Bureau of Biographical Records where I was working, and he'd tagged along.

"For the tenth and last time, Leon," she was saying as they came up to my desk, "you're supposed to be at Father's office. I can get around by myself, can't I? I'm no baby."

"Don't you like to have me come along?" he whined.

"Not when you should be at work. Now *go*."

"All right," he grumbled, sourly. "But I don't like it."

She watched him out of sight and then her cool pleasant eyes turned upon me to smile.

"Good morning, Mr. Flinders."

"Gee, you look sweet." I said it before I could stop myself. She was so much like Sally Hart. At once my old habits were forcing their way to the surface; and they were decidedly the wrong tactics for a fellow like me to attempt toward the daughter of my employer.

As for my amorous impulses—well, I had to put them under lock and key from the first.

Sally Barnes removed her white gloves and broad-brimmed hat and sat down in my chair, crossing her stockingless legs and resting her graceful arms on my table. She skimmed over my notes with her cool blue-gray eyes. And I wanted to take her in my arms.

She looked up suddenly. "Are you staring at me?"

"How could I help it? Er—I mean, how about my notes? Do you like them?"

"I've been reading all the reports you've turned over to father thus far. I seem to have come from a very dull family."

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"I'm sorry. Maybe I could retouch the family tree with a few brighter strokes—hang a rope or two from one of the branches—"

"I suspect my ancestors on my mother's side were much more interesting. In fact, I've one particular grandmother who started a book about one of *her* ancestors. It was a mystery book—and she got lost in the mysteries and never finished it. I think I'll have you work on that a part of the time."

"Of course, gladly. That is, if your father doesn't mind."

"He's so busy working on Verle Marble's plan for the underfed that he should not be trying to oversee this project. So I told him I'd take this project over."

"Then you're my boss?"

"What are you jumping around for?"

I seemed to have been sitting up on the study table and to have bounded down like a schoolboy at recess gong. I summoned all my dignity.

"I shall endeavor to be a satisfactory employee," I said stiffly.

"Come, Mr. Flinders, you needn't be like that. Unbend! Must you always go to extremes? We should be friends —"

I NODDED eagerly. Much too eagerly—for her cordial smile gave way to one of those aristocratic cold-shoulder looks. She rose and picked up her hat and gloves.

"I'll send you further instructions, Mr. Flinders. Good day."

The instructions reached me the next morning before the eight o'clock bells over the city sent me off to work. By the twelve o'clock bell I was so deep in the notes of my boss's grandmother's mystery that I didn't stop for lunch.

When the five o'clock bell rang I gathered up my papers and turned to find Sally Barnes waiting for me. White turban, abbreviated white sports suit, tanned bare legs, blue anklets and white oxfords made her look as cool and refreshing as a mountain-brook, as her blue-gray eyes looked at me with a hint of a smile and a tinge of teasing.

"Taxi service," said Sally Barnes. "I've been waiting for half an hour. You're working much too hard."

"Blame your grandmother," I said. "She had a nose for mysteries, believe me. This is a most fascinating bit of family history—"

"I thought so, too. Tantalizing, in fact. Have you come to grandmother's funny theory yet? Isn't it naive? She must have been superstitious, thinking some mysterious fate would revisit the family every few generations."

We sauntered down the steps and got into a convertible—a late model autoplane. She touched the controls. We spun around on its three wheels (few of the late models use four) and in a moment we were swinging around the government plateau, the circular glass plaza, and out on an airport take-off lane. Another touch of the controls —our wings spread out to cut the air, and up we went into the steamy blue.

Sally watched the dials until we reached 22,000. There we leveled off and drifted westward across the rugged, snow-capped mountain tops.

"You're not nervous about mountain flying, Mr. Flinders? You seem jumpy again today."

"That's from being called Mister. Call me Jim and I'll feel fine."

Sally Barnes gave me a suspicious look. "That sounds like a line out of my grandmother's mystery. That's what I've brought you up here to talk about. Her superstitions and all—you don't take any stock in them, do you?"

"Maybe I was too wrapped up in the fact of her story to catch the superstition," I said. My job, as I understood

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it, was to borrow from the grandmother mystery story notes and all other sources I could find, and put together a factual document on the lives of some earlier ancestors.

"You see, she believed that my great-great-great-great grandmother—a most interesting and charming person by the name of Sally Hart—met a cruel fate —"

*"Sally Hart!"* I blurted. "I knew it. I knew it the minute I—"

"Mr. Flinders, what is the matter with you? Is this altitude too high for you?"

"Pardon my gasping. Go on. You were saying—"

"This Sally Hart—you'll find she becomes my grandmother's central character as you read on. But you haven't got that far yet, have you? Her name isn't revealed in these first notes—"

"I—er—my knowledge of the times, you know. You say a cruel fate overtook her. Then what? She married a man named Hobbledehoy?"

"The point is," said Sally Barnes, never guessing what she was doing to me, "this long-forgotten ancestor named Sally Hart was terribly in love with a man, but before they married something dreadful and unaccountable happened. Her sweetheart, who remains nameless through all her personal records, mysteriously disappeared. Later Sally Hart married someone else, enjoyed two decades of fairly happy married life before her husband died."

"Hobbledehoy, the louse!"

"I don't remember the name. Anyway, after his death she spent several years of futile search for this earlier lover who had disappeared, and according to her memoirs her grown-up children thought her a bit eccentric that she should devote her life to a quest of this man who, after all, was no relative of theirs. But that's what she did, and when she died she was still firm in her love for this mysterious, nameless person who apparently walked out on her. Do you follow me?"

"I'm away ahead of you."

"And so my grandmother became fascinated with the story and went to work on the angle that *this nameless lover was some wandering spirit, undoubtedly evil—"*

"M-m-m-m. I don't like that theory."

"And that this same wandering spirit had approached other members of the family during later generations, threatening to blight their lives with disappointed love—"

"No! I can't swallow that!"

"And that this same fate would return to bring a disappointment to some other member of the family, probably one of Sally Hart's namesakes. Yes, she was desperately afraid for me. You can't swallow that either, can you? But you seem to be doing a lot of gulping."

"Take me down," I said. "I'm getting sick."

## CHAPTER XII

### I Leave a Card

"WELL, Mr. Flinders—Jim, since you don't mind—you can see that you're in for an interesting time wading through my grandmother's funny notions. Superstitions are such silly things, don't you think? But you know there are lots of businesses that are thriving on people's fears and ignorance?"

"This nameless lover who disappeared—" I mumbled, "Do *you* think he was some evil fate?"

"Well, there's no doubt that his leaving was a cruel fate for my great-great-great-great grandmother. But I do feel

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sure we've never unearthed all the story. We may never even discover the man's name. But if we can ever get over the first hurdle, then the files of the Bureau of Biographical Records may have something for us. You see why I need a careful scholar like yourself to do this research."

"You've made no mistake, Miss Barnes. I'm undoubedly the man for the job."

"We'll see," she said. We skimmed over the last of the peaks and nosed down toward Glass Capitol. It was just at that time of twilight when Lord Temp so often craved conversation, and my furtive eyes kept a sharp lookout.

"Relax, Jim." Sally Barnes tapped my hand lightly. Then she pointed down the mountainside to the big Indiana limestone mansion and the bright bit of foothills that included the red crags. More than ever those rocks looked like clay-red dinner plates stuck in the ground on an angle. Sally said, "Speaking of superstitions, I suppose you know that that place is the headquarters for the country-wide superstition racket, the SABA?"

"SABA? SABA?" I frowned. "I've seen that word in newspapers. Always written in capitals, isn't it?"

"You historians know so much about the past and so little about the present." Sally laughed. "Those initials, S-A-B-A, stand for 'See All, Believe All'—and it's a cult that claims a fifth of all the people in the country. If you believe the ad, it's the oldest organization in all civilization. And by all odds the most scientific of all systems of foretelling the future."

"But how could that be? The people of 1950 never heard of it."

"That, according to my father," said Sally Barnes, "is just one of the reasons why sensible people should keep hands off. He took the trouble to dig to the roots. When he found what a fake it was he wanted to pass a national law to put an end to it. But the big interests of Wurzelle's friends, coast to coast, are too well satisfied with it."

"SABA—Sees All, Believes All"—I laughed. "If SABA told you that Sally Hart's mystery man was coming into your life, would you believe it?"

"Don't be absurd. My grandmother was taken in by the SABA, but not I. You'd be surprised, though, how many prominent men in the government—even members of the Council of Twelve—will make visits to that SABA Temple and come away 'believing all.'"

"And this is an age of science."

"Unfortunately, our very faith in the word *science* plays right into the hands of these fakirs," said Sally. "All they have to do is to label their wares scientific, and the gullible public buys. It's an outrage. But words are free, and genuine science requires too much study for anyone other than a specialist to digest much of it. This SABA food comes predigested and sugar-coated and wrapped in pink packages, so that even people smart enough to be skeptical will feed on it because it satisfied some aesthetic hunger."

"You're a fighter, aren't you?"

"What makes you say that?"

"Aren't you picking a scrap with your dead grandmother?"

"Oh, I'm not blaming her. She didn't have the chance I'm having. A straight thinker helps keep us children straightened out on things. Only my brother was a little too anxious to learn the hard way, and so he's out on his own!"

"I didn't know you had a brother."

"He's away. Setting the world on fire, you know. You'll hear of him some day. By the way, weren't you going to hire an assistant on this research job?"

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"I'm still trying to get the young man your father recommended. Maybe I'll see him tonight. . . . What is tonight?"

I caught a look from Sally that was sufficient answer. She had a date with Leon King, I remembered. They were going to listen to the Executive Secretary's speech together.

"I hope you'll hear the speech too," she said. "And please don't look at me that way. Leon King is just one of my friends."

WE WERE skimming along on the highway again. The Glass Capitol was all lights and glitter, and the circular drive around the government plaza brought my ride to an end. As I got out of the autoplane I reached for Sally's hand, but she gave me a quick wave and was off. I watched her until her go-buggy was lost in the stream of bright-toned plastics and tinted metals that gave these traffic-ways such a dizzying skyrocket effect.

So this girl was Sally Hart's great-great-great-great granddaughter! I was fairly weaving. It would be easier than falling off a log to plunge head over heels in love.

But there was a stumbler. I could never ask my children to accept a great-great-great-great great grandfather by the name of Hobbledehoy.

I spoke to the first man who would lend me his ears.

"Brother, I'm a stranger in this day and age. When a fellow's nerves get tied in knots, where does he go to get untangled? Is t h e r e a sanitarium handy?"

"Have you been to a Public Service Minister? There's at least one to every downtown block, you know."

Down at the end of the first block-long building I found "Public Service Minister" on the directory and rode the elevator up to his office on the sixtieth floor.

"Your troubles?" he asked cordially. "Anything I can talk over with you?"

"What's going to happen to the country?"

The Public Service Minister, a bespectacled little man with a readiness to laugh at the slightest provocation, sat down and gave me a pamphlet, but said this problem was almost too much for him.

We talked the subject over and by the time we got down to bed-rock he admitted the cards were stacked for revolution.

"So you, a Public Service Minister, admit it!"

"I don't ask you to quote me," he said, with a nervous laugh. Then he grew very serious. "I don't know who you are or why you came. But I can tell you exactly what I think."

"Please do."

"Very well. Verle Marble won't win out with his plan to relieve the underfed. The overfed will throw him for a loss. That's why I think a revolution is inevitable. . . . There, I've said it."

He acted as if those words would cost him his job. Wasn't this a land of free speech?

"We Public Service Ministers," he explained, "are tax-supported. We're not substitutes for the ministers of the churches; we are simply advisors to all who come to us with troubles—personal, financial, psychological, moral. We apply our common sense knowledge as best we can. But now that I've advocated revolution, my hours in this office are numbered. A loss of salary? That's not the point. I give one half of my earnings every month to hungry people."

I sat for a long time thinking it over.

Revolution? Would Lord Temp let it happen?

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While I sat there the radio televisor brought in the speech of the Executive, and it was a good, honest plan. But this Public Service Minister kept shaking his important little head.

"The influential people will say it's idealistic," he muttered over. "All you have to do is brand something as idealistic and countless people will think it's impossible and bad. But many opinion-makers hide what they really think; namely, that idealistic plans might cost them some financial sacrifice. Their chairs are well cushioned, their bread well buttered, their shoes well heeled."

BY THIS time the Public Service Minister was pacing in much agitation. Obviously I had uncorked some rebellious talk that he usually kept encased in silence.

A gong rang out from some skyscraper spire in the next block.

"Why a bell at this time of day?" I asked innocently.

"Don't you know the meaning of the bells? You must hear them regularly three times a day."

I nodded. I had supposed they rang a routine working day.

"Actually they're meant to be reminders that we Public Service Ministers are ready to help," he said. "From now on you'll think of this conference whenever you hear the bell."

"But a bell at ten at night?"

"It's a Public Service Minister's privilege to ring a bell whenever he believes some one needs a reminder. The bell you just heard was some minister's effort to assist someone who is in a crisis at this very minute."

"Practically everybody I know is in a crisis," I said sarcastically.

The minister only nodded and gave a kindly laugh. "These extra bell ringings don't come often, but every time they do thousands of people are sure they're the very ones in need."

"And this bell trick really gets 'em?" I asked skeptically.

"It's just like a personal reminder to take a deep slow breath when the going gets too tough and you feel the need of a lift." He waited for my comment. I had nothing to say but much to think about.

"I'll go now. Maybe this deep breath has done me good."

"You dropped a card," said the Minister. He picked it up, glanced at the design of Lord Temp in the Chariot of Death. "Or did you mean it for me?"

"Ugh! No, no, no, I don't think you want it. You see, I don't have my name on it yet—"

He hung onto it. "This has been a curious talk. It goes deeper than our words. I'll keep this card to remember you by."

I returned to the elevator wondering what I had done?

Would Lord Temp approve?

While I waited I saw someone I knew dashing out of an upbound elevator. Bobby Hammock!

"Quick," he shouted, "there's another march on the capitol. Hefty and his hoodlums. We've got to stop them."

Then the Public Service Minister followed Bobby out, grabbing his hat on the run, and the door locked after them with a bang. They bounded down the rear stairs, Bobby yelling that there'd be a taxi on the next level. By the time I got to a window I saw them shooting out over an elevated trafficway, open a pair of wings to the air and take off over the lighted building tops.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Horror on the Highway

WHATEVER my private doubts about the motives of Lord Temp,

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I'll give him credit for keeping his ears to the ground and his fingers on all the jumpy public pulses. And for coming through with amazing taxi service.

Two minutes after the swift exit of Bobby and the Public Service Minister via the trafficway 59 stories up, I was riding along in the same general direction, having been picked up by Lord Temp.

"Some things can't wait till Saturday," said Lord Temp, grinning merrily.

"Are you making light of that institution known as the weekly bath?"

"I'm referring to our miracular boon to mankind," the skeleton replied, snapping his knuckles. "Things are going to happen tonight. I can feel it in my bones."

We reached a seemingly deserted spot on the edge of a cornfield that for some reason looked better to Lord Temp in the pitch blackness than scores of other fields we'd passed. We sent our conveyance on its way. Ahead of us was a gray highway bathed by amber floodlights. We sought the thickets along the side and hid among them.

Soon the marchers came along, a noisy three or four hundred of them, carrying banners.

An autoplane raced onto the scene from the opposite direction and braked to a stop. The three persons who got out began making motions at the paraders to turn back. First was Bobby, second, the starry-eyed blonde, and third, the Public Service Minister.

"There's the man who took one of your cards," I whispered to Lord Temp. "But you mustn't do anything to him."

"This chance is too good," said Lord Temp. "We'll bestow our blessing on several, whether they've had an official announcement or not. Any number of these paraders are inviting death, the same as that careless driver we rode with the other night."

We lay low and watched this throng gather closer to the car. I recalled the story of the careless driver. The newspapers had given it a short feature as one of the uncanny mysteries of nature! The poor fellow had no more than got in a well-placed last word at some scolding old aunts—something to the effect that they'd be sorry after he was gone—when suddenly he melted away, utterly and completely, from the top of his head to the soles of his shoes. He was gone, that was all there was to it. There was nothing left but empty clothes.

The story had created a sensation; a few similar occurrences of recent months were at once brought to light, including that of the custodian of a building in Cincinnati. But in general the public took all such stories with a liberal helping of salt.

ALL this came back to me with decided vividness as I watched the scene that now progressed before my eyes in the light of the highway floods.

"If you doubt that we're about to witness a battle," Lord Temp volunteered, "there are a dozen swift action spherical tanks hidden in an old irrigation ditch a few yards down the road. Lurking back of them are a thousand infantry. They're going to nip the hunger march in the bud."

At the moment I couldn't see any tanks or infantry. What I saw was Bobby Hammock in trouble. The parade of hunger marchers came on like stampeding cattle. There wasn't a chance he could stop them. Already they were bumping past him rough shod.

Then someone swung a club and Bobby Hammock barely dodged the blow. I gasped.

"Get him out of there, Lord Temp!

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He hasn't a chance!"

Maybe the skeleton didn't hear me. He was bending forward eagerly like a gambler at the races who knows he can't lose. This was pie for him.

"Lord Temp!" I cried. "They're making *her* take the banner. Stop them!"

I leaped up intending to dash to the rescue. But Lord Temp smacked me down with his electrical hand. I fell in the edge of the thicket. There I remained on hands and knees watching the awfulness that took place only thirty yards away.

That giant called Hefty the Ramrod was waving his mob on as if he were some mighty conqueror. But his false bravery was revealed in his stunt of forcing the starry-eyed blonde to take the banner and march ahead of everyone.

"*She* didn't want this parade!" I hissed to Lord Temp.

"She's got it now," he grinned. "She walked right into it."

Under the amber highway lights you could see her look of terror as she turned back crying for Bobby. The clubs had fallen on Bobby and he was being trampled underfoot.

The Public Service Minister was still scrapping, running backward before the oncoming mob trying to wave them to a stop. He must have been realizing in that awful moment how tough a job it would be to organize such men for a full fledged revolution.

All at once the dozen tanks rolled up out of the blackness on the other side of the road. A deafening amplifier shouted at the gang to stop dead in their tracks.

*"Halt! . . . Halt! . . . Stop in your tracks every one of you in the name of the law. Stop or we'll SHOOT!"*

Hefty's arms flew up in fright. He released his club and scurried to one side, still shouting commands to the others to keep marching.

THEN the guns made good their threat. A blaze of fire shot out from the tank artillery.

This I saw, for my eyes were on the right level to be certain: *The gunfire all went over the heads of the crowd.* If there had been infantry fire I couldn't have been sure; but as later investigation proved, there was no fire from the infantry, only from the tanks.

It was a fire calculated to scare the mob to death and it did all of that and more.

Exactly what did happen, in addition to the fire of tank artillery was that my companion waved his right arm with the points of those deadly electrical fingerbones leveled at the front of the chaotic mob. Fifteen or twenty of the figures *melted away.*

Under those lights you might have thought they were being cut down by bullets, but I knew otherwise.

The gunfire stopped instantly, and part of the panicky mob stopped. Hefty and others were waving flags of truce. Their abortive revolution was over.

Lord Temp and I stayed in hiding to watch the officers from the militia advance and count their casualties. We could hear them arguing over how it had happened, and the way they were blaming each other and swearing and ranting you'd have thought there would be some pistol shots next.

"Seventeen of 'em blown galley-west," someone said bitterly, kicking around among the collapsing clothes. "One of 'em's a girl."

"And none of 'em is that trouble-making Hefty that brewed all this trouble. Wait a minute, here. Where's the bodies? These rag bags are empty."

"Yeah, no need for ambulances. Baskets instead. Let's gather 'em up and

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lay 'em on Wurzelle's doorstep. He's the Council member that put us up to it."

"He didn't tell us to blow 'em to hell," said some staunch Wurzelle defender. "All he said was, scare the pants off 'em."

"We'll courtmartial the gunners."

"*They* couldn't have done *this*. I saw their fire go over. And you can't show me a mark of any kind on this—"

"Hell, what goes on here? There's only half a corpse here an' it's slipping outa my hands, melting away into nothing, by heaven."

Lord Temp touched me on the arm. "Out of your paralysis, friend. Our chariot waits."

He must have picked me up and dropped me in. I don't think I had it in me to move under my own power.

## CHAPTER XIV

### We Bet on Vetto

SCIENTISTS and newspapers alike were outdoing themselves to explain the mystery of melting persons, and no longer was there any doubt on the part of the public that they did melt.

Where the searchers for truth failed, the charlatans and fakirs flourished. All at once it was rumored around that the SABA cult was doing a judgment-day business.

From everywhere came the inquiries of the people. Telephone operators couldn't keep up with the calls, the mail trucks to SABA branch offices all over the country were said to be overloaded.

If some mysterious melting process could act upon us without warning, we the terrorized people demanded to know what it meant. If the doctors couldn't tell us we must turn to the mystics (who—as Sally Barness had noted—falsely invoked the name of science).

And what did the high and mighty leader of the SABA tell the people? Nothing.

He gave them a monstrous big promise, however. He was going to tell them as soon as the time was ripe. And when the time was ripe he would tell everyone once, and once only, and those who were not members at that time would never be allowed to hear from his lips at any later date the true explanation for the phenomena that mystified everyone on the continent.

And so the membership of SABA increased by thirty-five percent in a single week, and additional percentages in the three exciting weeks that followed. And eventually it had enrolled a membership believed to exceed one person out of every four in the country.

Many of these members were from the downtrodden and underfed millions. It was they who advertised to each other that SABA promised there would be solace for everyone.

Well, Lord Temp watched this SABA business and was attracted.

"What would a fakir like that do," the skeleton said to me, grinding his teeth with happy inspiration, "if he suddenly fell heir to a genuine hunk of magic?"

"He wouldn't go broke," I said.

"Gird up your loins, Flinders. You're about to swing a big deal. This SABA octopus has arms all over the nation with tentacles all ready to go to work for us. This will be easier on you than circulating my cards."

"What wouldn't?" I said, for as a colporteur I had proved a complete flop. That deal with the Public Service Minister had given me a permanent chill.

So I went to the SABA mansion to see the noted leader of the SABA, Gravelli Vetto.

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He was a mountainous man who took command of you from the moment you met him, in a politely overbearing way.

He reminded you of a big brown ox, well curried and perfumed and adorned with a dress suit and a slick coat of impeccable manners.

THERE was no point in my trying to say anything for I couldn't get a word in between commas. He had just enough resemblance to Mussolini to remind me to beware of stabs in the back. And while he talked I kept thinking of a fine little Italian pal of mine, a newsboy for the Zephyr, who used to hate Mussolini's heart like poison.

Well, by the time this unctuous ox got around to asking me what line of forecasts I wanted to purchase I was already sure that Lord Temp had made an awful mistake sending me here. But orders are orders.

"First I ask my customers what they think they want," he was saying, drilling me with his eyes and tossing his head back and glinting as if he saw right through me. "Second, I ask them what they really want. Third, I tell them it's no use hiding anything from me, I know their thoughts run still deeper. So out with it, Mr. Flinders. Let us draw back the curtains."

Real curtains back of him parted, and our little section of the floor slid back like an orchestra platform in a twentieth century stage show and as the curtains swished we glided back through them, one after another, into a tower.

"Into the secrets of our mind," he said. "Into the deep purple secrets of our mind. Now. We are stopped. Tell me all. I'll sell you whatever knowledge you need."

"I didn't come to buy."

"You must have. Everyone comes to me to buy my wisdom."

"I came here to sell you some."

"Sell me? Erg. So that's it."

Swish. The series of curtains broke open and our mobile floor rolled us right back to the front conference room.

This I took to symbolize Gravelli Vetto's sales' resistance. Or perhaps he was closing the secrets of his mind. His face tightened and he gave me the cold eye.

"What's your game?"

"I represent the Lord of Temporary Death."

"Never heard of him. What's his racket?"

"He deals out a sort of death to people—*only not permanent death.*"

"How much a head?"

"Nothing. He does it for charity."

"A racket like that is doomed from the start. I don't see his angle."

"You wouldn't understand, maybe. But he thinks *you* can make money out of it if you want to work with him."

"So?" Gravelli Vetto's eyes brightened. "Come back. Let's talk this thing over."

Back through the draperies we swept again and came to a stop in the velvet purple enclosure, the tower-like room with windows and purple lights near the lofty ceiling. This, I knew, must be the source of the purple light I had often observed when sailing over this mansion in a chariot.

"You could do well with our racket, I'm sure, Mr. Vetto," I said. "Unfortunately you'll have to be a second lieutenant."

"Go on. What's the secret?" From ambition in his eyes you could see he figured he'd be the head of the corporation in a couple of weeks or so. "Go on, Mr. Flinders."

"You've been promising the people some explanations on a certain phenomenon of terror. Do you have your answer ready?"

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"And what makes you think I don't?"

"Because the Lord of Temporary Death hasn't told you. He's the only one that knows how he does it."

THE big ox began bellowing as if he'd suddenly sat on barbs of painful suspicions.

"You've cooked up a scheme to get something out of me. I don't trust you."

"I represent the Lord of Temporary Death. He sent me in here. If you're smart you'll invite him in for a conference."

"Please cease to make these insulting references to my intelligence. I'll warn you I'm the cleverest soothsayer in the business and I can be cruel. If this upstart who calls himself the Lord of Temporary Death is trying to whip up a new racket, he'd better ask my permission."

"Shall I tell him that?"

"Certainly."

I eyed the big ox of a charlatan steadily. "You—you want me to carry that insult back to him—lay you open to his wrath—"

"I spit on his wrath—"

I gave a low whistle. "Mr. Vetto, you're tampering with temporary death."

"Bah! Whatever this fakir's game, he couldn't touch me. . . . *Oooogh! Whooo . . . arrre . . . youuuu?*"

Gravelli Vetto's huge eyes were staring at something back of me. His lower lip quivered.

In the familiar rattling voice came the stinging bitter words that made this swarthy mountain of a man turn as gray as marble.

"I ammm the Lorrrd of Temmmmporarrry Deathhhh!"

The red robe whirled past me with a swish that caused a weird rustling of the purple draperies. Lord Temp stood there, tall and impressive, his teeth gleaming out of his polished yellow skull.

"Shake hands?" said Lord Temp with an evil smile, and the sparks crackled from his fingers as he extended his arm.

Gravelli Vetto didn't shake. He sank down on the floor like a deflating balloon, and his eyes were spinning.

"That's right," said Lord Temp. "Sit down and think it over. My lieutenant will stay and explain the matter. Remember you don't have a monopoly on the world's evil doings. I, the Lord of Temporary Death, am not as new at this game as you think. You claim SABA is thousands of years old. My lieutenant knows better than that."

"Right," I said. "Back in my century it didn't exist."

"As for myself," Lord Temp concluded, "I've bided my time for ages." Then to me, "Carry on, Flinders."

And with that the lordly skeleton turned to the draperies, swung up to the tower window as gracefully as any spider monkey, and disappeared. His farewell gesture threw a shower of sparks that knocked Vetto back to the floor; and for an hour afterward the ashen-faced charlatan thought a meteor shower had his number.

## CHAPTER XV

### Movies from the Past

WELL, I succeeded in getting Gravelli Vetto lined up and I was amazed at the way he went to work. I never saw such a splendid proof of the workings of that brightest of all the charms of the good old capitalistic system, private initiative.

Not that Gravelli Vetto wasn't doing pretty well before we came along. His SABA was already scooping in handsome millions. But with this boost

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from Lord Temp he climbed straight into the multi-million brackets.

It was interesting to see how Gravelli changed his advertising. It reminded me of Hollywood in the old days when every film was announced as the most gigantic, stupendous, colossal spectacle ever produced—and the ad writers would be bankrupt for words when a greater-than-the-innumerable-world's-greatest films came along.

Gravelli Vetto's claims had already hit the zenith. He would positively reveal anything and everything to anybody who would place the necessary cash on the line and become a member of SABA. But now—well, he actually had something and in effect he roared and bellowed until his poor throat was hoarse.

I was fortunate enough to receive from Lord Temp an eye-witness account of the conference in which Gravelli Vetto led one of the biggest big shots of the nation back into the purple draperies.

This Wurzelle was one of the "Goldfish"—a member of the Council of Twelve who ran the country. He was a crude, blustery man with hair like yellow pine slivers and fists like sledge hammers. I knew from his political record that he was a human dynamo crossed with a buzz saw, cousin to a steam-whistle, half-brother to a jackass.

Wurzelle was the leader of the fight against Verle Marble. He would have none of Marble's reforms to put the underfed back on their feet. He'd much rather see them knocked back on their ears or some other part of their undernourished anatomies.

"I'm a busy man," Wurzelle had snarled at Gravelli Vetto. "Gimme the gist of your information and be quick about it."

"Your Honor," and you can imagine that diabolical old mystic doing a scornful Mussolini with his jaw, "you must endorse the whole of SABA or none of it. If you are willing to *see all and believe all—*"

"All right, but keep my name out of your devilish ads. I got enough scraps on my hands smackin' down these half-baked revolutions."

"I am the possessor of information which will relieve you of all worry. See all, believe all."

"See all, believe all," Wurzelle had mocked. "Where's your crystal sphere, or do you use tea leaves?"

"We shall turn off all the lights except the purple glow overhead . . . There. Now I shall retire behind this curtain and speak to you out of a trance. Stay—listen . . ."

FROM Lord Temp's hiding place above the draperies he had watched the two scheming faces as these men tossed the fate of fifty million people back and forth like a bean bag.

"I don't know where you got it," Wurzelle had finally said. "But this new power of yours is the damndest thing I ever saw. It makes us government goldfish nothing but a swarm of flies. Whoever you stole it from, don't let it slip out of your hands. You and I are about to make history."

"And money," Vetto had added.

All of which Lord Temp related to me with a shrug of his clavicles. He had no love for these big-shot shysters, but at any rate his big plan was at last in high gear.

I LOVED Sally Barnes for the way she comforted Bobby Hammock after that awful tragedy on the highway.

Poor Bobby, he looked at least ten years older when he came in to see me the following week. He was a changed man, and the warm humor in his youthful face had turned to a cold fire. His

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starry-eyed blonde was gone, a victim of ruthlessness and terror.

"The job? Thanks, I thought you'd remember me, Flinders. I'll need something to do while I gather myself together."

We worked along for several weeks. I left most of the original task of Prescott Barnes' family research to him. The mysteries of Sally's grandmother's manuscripts were my own little oyster. I may add that I permitted myself the luxury of a few more theater dates and afternoon coffee sessions with Sally (whenever I could throw that persistent Leon King off the track) not to mention joyrides over the mountains to take in the better sunsets.

The research work of the Bureau of Biographical Data became engrossing in more ways than one.

Under the stress of Sally's dogged determination, Bobby and I went to work trying to discover *my* name and what sort of guy I really was. Intriguing business.

"The more I learn about my great-great-great-great grandmother's lost boy friend," Sally would say, "the more I'm convinced she missed the boat. He must have been a really interesting guy."

"Handsome, too," I commented, winking to myself.

"Was he?" Bobby asked in surprise. "Where did you find that information?"

"Er—just reading between the lines." I glanced at myself in the polished black marble pillar. I couldn't have been so bad in Sally Hart's time. In spite of the intervening century and a half I could still tell myself there was a lot of Hollywood in this old map.

Bobby, darn him, was so all-fired thorough that he wouldn't let me get away with this claim to good looks. He'd like to see the reference, he said, for he'd been under the impression from these old letters that this anonymous Jim-somebody-or-other was an awkward lout.

"Sabotage," I muttered.

"Here's a passage," said Bobby. "It reads: 'I do hope they won't show that dreadful movie of you, Jim. You did have such a time getting down the street. Hobb told me about it—' and so on."

"Hobbledehoy!" I groaned and excused myself for a drink of water.

MY nerves began working nights concocting escapes, until I thought of charging Sally Barnes overtime. I was forever popping off, knowing too much about this man; and then Bobby, all in innocence, would hook me. What was worse, I could never remember what I was supposed to know about these times.

This net began to tighten around me. Soon I saw it was just a matter of days. Sally was trimming the field down close. The man we were searching for lived in one particular city and he disappeared in one particular year, and he was well known in one particular profession. And there weren't too many thousand biographies that fell into those three categories.

Now when Bobby Hammock came up with the additional theory that there was probably a home-made movie to be found on our "long lost boy friend," I knew my hours were numbered.

All of which had me wishing that Lord Temp would come along and deliver me to another climate.

But my attitude was overturned in one quick flash when we came upon the record of Sally Hart's marriage. *She hadn't married Hobbledehoy after all!*

"Smith!" I gasped. "Your great-great-great-great-grandfather's name was Smith."

"That's right," said Sally. "She met him after she went to work for the tele-

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phone company. A very nice person, it seems."

"That's different." I gave such a sigh that Sally and Bobby both stared at me. "Smith—nobody I know—er—I mean—*Smith!* Good name. Makes you feel all right about her descendants and everything."

"Well, I *hope* so," Sally laughed. "I'm amazed at how much interest you take in my ancestors, Jim."

"The more I learn, the more I feel that I know you."

"But ancestors aren't everything," said Sally. "We can't know Sally Hart fully until we know more about this man she was so devoted to."

Well, in my burst of exultation I did it.

"Wait for me. I've just had an inspiration."

I marched straight to the reference desk and requested that all available material on one James S. Flinders be delivered to our alcove at once.

WITHIN ten minutes the three of us were watching a movie of Yours Truly, Jim Flinders, vintage of 1950, as he dashed down the busy street one breezy summer morning. I thought Bobby Hammock and Sally would recognize instantly that this was a picture of me. Maybe they were too busy taking in the antiquated automobiles and costumes and window signs.

On the screen I went through my now familiar antics. I chased the newspaper that had blown out of a woman's hands, bumped into three or four persons, knocked over a trash can, saw my hat get run over by a truck, and finally bought the lady another newspaper—which she refused.

The film came to an end. Bobby hummed, mildly amused. Sally gave me a wistful smile and said she really must see that again.

"He was rather handsome, I believe, though the picture wasn't very clear," she said. "What did you say his name was?"

I rambled on to evade the question. "Three or four boxes of materials here to tell all about him. Clippings and such. But tell me, Sally, did you really like him?"

"Oh, I thought he was very chivalrous, didn't you?"

"Gallant as they come," Bobby smiled. "But that's not much index to his real character, is it? You've got to know what a man stands for."

This was Sally's very thought. What did this man represent besides momentary chivalry?

"He was probably pretty free with his insults short of slander, being a hard-boiled newspaper man," I suggested.

"Maybe he wasn't really so hard-boiled," said Sally. "Of course if it's true that he dabbled seriously in some death schemes, then we'll have to dislike him and pity the one who loved him so."

I gulped like I was swallowing a cocoanut.

"But if he was strong and upright," Sally went on, "I'll see that his name has a place in our family history. Am I right, Jim?"

I couldn't make my voice work so I nodded and moved my lips.

"And his name?" Sally stared at the lettering on the boxes. "Flinders. *James S. Flinders* . . . But that's *your* name, Jim."

"Funny coincidence, Jim," Bobby laughed. "*You* weren't ever in love with a Sally Hart, were you?"

"I sure as hell was. You can tell that one to all your grandchildren."

"But Jim!" Sally was gasping. "You can't mean it."

"When I first came to this century and found you, Sally Barnes," I said,

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"you were so much like Sally Hart that I almost caught you in my arms and kissed you."

And then and there some old repressed impulses stampeded me. I drew Sally into my arms and kissed her like nobody's business. I must say the poor girl was too baffled to resist. I'm sure she thought I was crazy.

## CHAPTER XVI

### Personal Blackout

AT that moment my pail of secrets was turning into a sieve and I thought I would have to spill everything. In Bobby's face there was skepticism; but Sally's eyes were full of questioning.

And there was Leon King, who had sauntered up to the doorway of our booth just in time to see me drop my inhibitions and take Sally. He looked as if he could use some explanations too.

"Run the film again," I said to Bobby Hammock. "You'll recognize me this time."

So we ran the film again and by the grace of heaven I was called to the telephone before it was over.

"Prescott Barnes' secretary. Mr. Flinders? Mr. Barnes would like to talk with you at your earliest convenience. You'll come at once? Excellent."

Thus duty called, and thus I walked out on a thousand questions.

The errand which Prescott Barnes wished upon me might have ended fatally. I didn't know, and neither did Barnes, that I would walk straight into a hotbed of violence. The Goldfish Bowls were presumed to be fully protected.

But Barnes' political enemies had grown treacherous in their fight against the moderation policies. Barnes was sure someone was prying into his and Verle Marble's plans regularly.

Pride goeth before a fall. I was as chesty about this little appointment as the muscles boys in the physical culture ads.

Prescott Barnes is gaining confidence in me, I said to myself. In time I'll be as dear to his heart as his wastebasket prodigy, Leon King, I hope, I hope. Just why he is checking up on these night guards is none of my affair, but I'm the guy with the nerve to walk in on whatever monkey business may be going on in his Goldfish Bowl at three in the morning.

I should have armed myself with a bit of artillery. But you know me—always ready to bet on the impulse of the moment. I'd been lulled with a false sense of security by those twentieth century movies: in case of violence there was sure to be a vase to throw or a rug to jerk out from under the villain's feet.

Fact is, I didn't want to lay out a mess of redbacks for a ray gun I'd probably never use. I could have borrowed Leon King's, no doubt. He had a small amber-handled ray pistol which he liked to carry for effect, always pretending he was such an important guy that he practically deserved a bodyguard.

No, I didn't ask to borrow his amber-handled ray pistol. I'd be a sap to take favors from my chief rival.

AT THE appointed hour that night I walked through the government plaza and strolled twice around the south row of Goldfish Bowls. Only the night lights filtered through from Barnes' glass-walled sanctum, and none of these offices was occupied.

I paused to inspect the window-like rectangle of black glass to the left of

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the doorway. It reflected the night-lights of the offices below the plaza level. This device, operating through a system of reflectors, allowed the night guards on my level to check up on those of the lower levels. Similar conveniences were supposed to serve the guards below the surface.

The black glass rectangle supplied reflected miniatures of central hall lights burning in each of three levels. Any passing guard could have read an all's-well from these tiny lights from the opposite side of the promenade. It was naive of me to go over and inspect the rectangle closely.

I rubbed my fingers over the slick surface as any curious person might do; then rubbed my fingerprints off with a handkerchief, as any cautious person might. In doing so *I created a slight ripple in the glassy surface.*

I tried to smooth out the irregularity. Something was strange about this surface. There was a flexible coating over the whole glass rectangle. Did it *belong?*

I paced across the promenade to the next Goldfish Bowl and examined the surface of its black rectangle.

Hard glass, as smooth as steel.

My heart was pounding fast as I bounded back to Barnes' Bowl. This end of the plaza seemed almost deserted. Across to the south were the silent floodlighted fronts of skyscrapers along Victory Boulevard, half a mile away. The lines of light along the boulevard denoted only thin streams of traffic. The arms of the big red neon clock on one of the towers pointed to twenty minutes after three.

It was the dead of night and my heart was pounding and I was racing from one Goldfish Bowl to another, making three dim shadows of myself dart and lengthen across the promenade, and I was scared. I'd have called a guard if there had been one in sight.

Then I was back at the entrance of Barnes' Goldfish Bowl and my nervous fingers were tearing off the sheet of cellophane. And I was telling myself not to be excited, what's a sheet of cellophane over a black glass?

SUDDENLY I saw what it was. It was a screen that blacked out the parts that no guard was meant to see.

I guessed instantly that other reflector instruments on other levels had been blacked out the same way. For now a tiny reflection of a lighted room filtered through a coating of what might have been smoke dust.

I swabbed the bare glass with my handkerchief. The lighted room came through as clear as your face after a shave. There was only one man in the room, but he was working fast enough for three, rummaging through Prescott Barnes' papers.

Who? The reflector was too small for me to be sure, and it looked almost straight down on his head and shoulders.

But that cocky jaw, that forehead, that hair of yellow pine splinters—by heavens, if that wasn't the Honorable Wurzelle up to dishonorable tricks I'd be willing to eat the black glass, cellophane, reflections and all.

I whirled, aware that three streaking shadows from across the promenade had suddenly converged at the feet of a thin angular man. My glimpse of him was all too brief. It seems to me that I gasped, "Le—" and then broke off.

Broke off because I was about to make the mistake of calling this man Leon King just because there was something similar in the angularity of his shoulders.

But this creature of the night, whose face was masked in black, cut me off before I could utter a word. There

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was a gleam of something yellow in his hand as it came crushing down on me without warning.

He beat me down with three blinding blows. I struck the pavement face down. The blows kept coming, but utter blackness came faster.

And that was the last that I knew for a long, long time.

## CHAPTER XVII

### The March of Fifty Million

THEY tell me that I was in a coma for months.

Even after I was known to be on the long slow road to recovery my periods of consciousness were brief and fleeting.

Terribly tortured were those first broken hours of semi-consciousness for they were filled with sharp questionings from officers and reporters who were trying to piece together the story of the Goldfish Bowl violence.

There wasn't much that I could tell. I stated my belief that the man who had found his way into Barnes' office could have been Wurzelle. But I couldn't support my conjecture.

As to the thug who had evidently been posted to keep watch, I couldn't offer the slightest clue to his identity.

The whole investigation got nowhere. Far more serious events were soon to relegate it to the limbo of unfinished and virtually forgotten business.

I slept away several more weeks.

They tell me that Sally Hart came to see me three times a week. Sometimes Bobby Hammock would come with her, sometimes Leon King or one of her other numerous admirers.

Nice lads, all of them, courteously inquiring about my aches and pains and listening to my story of how I got them. Momentary chivalry, Sally had observed, was no true index of a man's character. You needed to know what a fellow stood for. Well, I hoped she'd sort these suitors over carefully and consider me still in the running if I ever pulled through this awful listlessness.

Prescott Barnes was highly dubious about any suggestion that his colleague Wurzelle would be guilty of breaking into his private papers.

"You're quite right, Mr. Barnes," Leon King would chime in with an important swagger that would set me back for another week of convalescing. "An important man like Wurzelle *wouldn't*. He just *wouldn't*."

"But you'll have to admit," Sally would add, "that Wurzelle is always ready to head off your every plan and explode your every speech, Dad."

"There could be a traitor in our ranks," Leon King would conclude with that gleam of destiny in his impertinent schoolboy face.

Then the doctor would come in and stop their talk. I was in danger of losing what I had gained, he said, and must cease these overexertions. No more company for several days.

Then one day I was wide awake and there was my old friend Hammock sitting in the corner reading the Undernourished Gazette. My interest in his world, the jungles of the unemployed, came surging back to me. I was feeling great.

"What has happened?" I asked.

"The revolution failed."

"It's all over?"

"It wasn't even tried. Some joker turned the tide into a new ocean."

"Not—not temporary death!"

"Sally's coming in a few minutes," he said. "She'll tell you."

I SHOULD have guessed then that the awful hour had come. But just

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now I felt so good—and here was Sally Barnes coming back to see me.

Was that a wonderful feeling! Sally was all smiles and she bent down close to me and pressed my hands and I thought she was going to kiss me and I lifted my head up.

"Lie down, Jim," she said. "You're not to exert any energy."

Gosh! Didn't she know it cost me more energy *not* to kiss her? She was the prettiest thing you ever saw, fresh and fragrant like flowers in the morning dew, and all sunshiny with smiles.

There was plenty of trouble in the air, and she and Bobby hadn't talked with me long before I got to the core of it.

*A great march of death was going on at this very hour.*

It was as wide and as deep as the continent. The millions of underfed from all over the country were converging at the Glass Capitol.

As Sally pictured this great mass movement Bobby bowed his head and closed his eyes. He was thinking of Lucille Boyington. To him the tragedy of this march was the tragedy of Lucille, multiplied by fifty million.

"You mean that these people are melting away when they march on the capitol?"

"It's their intention to melt away," said Sally. "I haven't had the nerve to go see."

I looked out the window toward the Glass Capitol Plateau. I could see the long line of ragged marchers moving slowly across the center of the city, walking westward.

"Where are they gathering?"

"They're marching right into the old mine shafts," said Bobby, without looking up.

Those mine shafts, Sally proceeded to explain, were known to branch out into one of the most extensive underground tunnel systems in the world. To this realm the fifty million were being relegated *for the duration of their voluntary death.*

"By *whom?*" I barked.

"By the Council of Twelve," said Sally. "My father cast one of the three dissenting votes. Nine Goldfish put the measure over."

Bobby looked up with sullen eyes to gauge my reaction. I was shaking my head, slowly. I couldn't understand how those revolutionary millions could submit to such an outrage.

"They asked for it," said Bobby, and again he bowed his head in sad silence.

"Some high-powered organizing did it," said Sally. "There was lots of propaganda dropped over cities several weeks ago."

"I remember," I said under my breath.

"Then there was the fanatical wave of SABA. After Gravelli Vetto got next to this mysterious technique of making people die *for awhile* and then come back to life, the membership in SABA grew by leaps and bounds."

I FROWNED at the ceiling. Lord Tempt must have been right all along. People *did* want temporary death—at least some people.

"It was amazing to discover how many of the downtrodden masses were ready to fall for this awful blessing which Vetto and his SABA magic offered them. They jumped for it."

"Like rats jumping into a bottomless hole."

"But the strange thing is," said Sally, "that Gravelli Vetto *has* proved his point. In more than one case he has brought vanished persons back to life."

"Vetto!" I muttered cynically. "Vetto didn't do it. He just took the credit. It would take some power greater than Vetto."

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Sally and Bobby were both looking at me intently. Of all the troubled thoughts in their minds this was obviously one of the most confusing—that a low-down money-grabbing heartless fakir like Gravelli Vetto should hold some mysterious power over life and death.

Bobby spoke slowly. "What do you know about it, Flinders?"

"Get me the doctor," I said. "I've got to get out of here. We'll take a ride over to the Tungsten Mountain and see what's happening."

That afternoon we edged our way through the throngs of pedestrians who flooded the streets.

At last we came to a stop on a narrow road that overlooked the five or six entrances to the tungsten mine tunnels.

"They're singing," Sally gasped. "Marching to their death singing."

The long black column that came from far across the city, ten miles distant, widened near the approaches to this mountain—widened into a stream of human figures. One arm of the human delta flooded into the mine entrance within forty yards of us.

These marchers from the human jungles were clad in ragged gray and ugly brown and faded blue. The only touches of brightness in this drab parade were the occasional banners.

With binoculars we could read many of the slogans.

"No food for us. No work from us."

"We go—but we shall return!"

"No one will miss us until we are gone."

"This is what the world has done to us. Driven us to our death. Think it over."

There was something childish, you'll notice, in the tone of these last words. Lord Temp had often reminded me that children like the fancy of revenge upon their parents or teachers—the sweet delights of standing by and seeing how sorry people are after they've died from mistreatment. It's a fancy that some grown-ups never outgrow, and it was certainly evident in the self-pitying sentiments of many of these banners.

THE thing that made it all so terribly gruesome was that each and every marcher who entered the tunnels *did melt away at once!*

We could see that melting take place from the instant the marchers entered the shadow of the overhanging ledge above the entrance.

The three of us left our car and hiked down the rocky slope to a point that looked in on the tunnel's mouth and there we saw the complete process.

There was no doubt about it, it took nerve to walk into that shadow. Only a strong net woven of invisible cords of crowd psychology could have held these masses to their purpose. Sometimes a group within the ranks would hesitate and the column would momentarily buckle and send a wave of hesitation surging down the line. These moments had been anticipated, however, and strong leaders had been placed at frequent intervals to check any chance impulses.

Some of the marchers were so horrified by the sight of the melting of their comrades ahead that they slipped blindfolds over their eyes for the last few yards of the march. Others turned around and walked backward, letting their scornful eyes rest upon the capitol city until those eyes passed out of existence.

Whether they entered with a will or reluctantly, singing or in silence, forward or backward, filled with the bitter gall of hatreds or the glad solace of final relief, they all melted away in the same fashion.

Heads faded away like swiftly fading

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light. Shoulders, arms, chests flattened into empty sagging clothes. And still the bodies would move on into the dark tunnel, until finally there would be only the feet to continue the march, dragging empty clothing after them.

From deep inside the tunnel came the gentle noises of ragged clothes and shoes stumbling along down the sloping mine shafts—hollow whisperings, like green leaves sifting down into a dry well.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Exit Bobby Hammock

WHEN I was at last able to take my eyes from the sight I noticed that Sally was pale, trembling, and her eyes were filled with tears.

"What faith they must have . . . But *will they come back?*"

Bobby Hammock was clutching Sally's hand, unconsciously, no doubt, for I knew his thoughts were of that certain blonde and these, her people.

"Can't any one stop them?" Sally sobbed.

"Not now." Bobby's voice was barely audible. "Your father tried hard enough. But Wurzelle carried the government."

That was how it had happened. During the weeks of my coma—the weeks when Lord Temp had meant me to be at work distributing his cards—he and Gravelli Vetto had sold this awful bill of goods to the nation.

The gullible unemployed had snatched at it like the proverbial drowning man snatches at a straw. The whole fifty million underprivileged had quickly endorsed it. The demonstrations of dead being returned to life had been so convincing. And these demonstrations had been circulated everywhere through television.

There was the case of a custodian of a building in Cincinnati. He had melted away on the rooftop after raising the flag one morning. On the movie screens you could see the excitement in his eyes—yes, and the honest conviction—as he told the story of his temporary death.

Then his questioners would ask him about his existence during this period of so-called death, and you should see his face light up. Yes, he had had an experience of sorts, he'd admit, but what? He was discreet enough not to say.

The mysterious rumors which followed on the heels of this instance made the thought of temporary death more than a little attractive to some people. Perhaps they too would find some substitute existence—a sort of lark—be it physical or spiritual.

There was the case of the man who had lost his job and gone home to face the music, who had passed into nothingness the minute two old aunts had jumped at him. *He* had now returned to report that there was nothing harmful, moreover he had won some sweet revenge over the female tyrants of his home. At last they were eating out of his hands. And the firm that had fired him—ah! *there* was the most wonderful result of all. He'd been rehired.

Multiply these instances by two or three dozen and you have a fair sample of the new and mystifying phenomena that the American public of 2100 were forced to explain.

Add to this the authority of SABA, casting an aura of super-science upon it, and you can see what a tug these doings exerted upon every halfway gullible person.

Not to mention the appeal it had for Goldfish who saw in it an easy solution to the nation's awful plight.

And so Lord Temp's boast was made good. The downtrodden masses had

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asked for temporary death. The government had granted their request and set the place and the time, provided the resting place for their spirits, and purchased the promise from Gravelli Vetto that *his* phenomenal power would be at work on the dot.

IF ONLY Lord Temp had seen fit to run off on a vacation, what a lovely headlong crash Vetto and his SABA fakery would have taken. Ah, me. Sometimes I wished that I had played my friendship with Lord Temp to better advantage.

But I had been in a coma during all these happenings, and now the great holocaust was going on right before my eyes.

"No one can say I did it," I murmured absently to myself. "But I was darned lucky I got socked—"

"What are you saying?" Sally spoke up sharply, and I suddenly jerked out of my reflections and remembered I was in company.

"I was just wondering," I said, "what will happen to them—I mean, before they return to life."

Sally stared at me, and Bobby uttered an amazed question.

"Do — do you actually believe in these SABA tricks?"

I must have blushed. Suddenly I wanted to tell them everything. Was I not free from any responsibility for this mass suicide, whether it might turn out well or badly?

"SABA—no," I said slowly. "But this exhibition of power is not SABA. I *know* what it is. I've seen it from the inside."

"*You!*" Sally gasped. "But how?"

"I can't explain. But take my word for it," I measured every syllable as I spoke, "*these people who are going into death will live again!*"

Bobby's face was a picture of anguished hopes. "I have confidence in you, Flinders. If you say it—"

"I *do* say it. Don't ask me to explain. But it's true. There is a Lord of Temporary Death who is playing upon these people. They're only melting into a separate existence. He means to bring them back two or three years *somehow*."

"And Lucille?"

"Her fate was this same temporary death," I said. "I know it. So take heart—"

I might have held my tongue if I had only stopped to realize that Bobby Hammock's nerves were on trigger edge. Bobby leaped over the rocks and dashed across the thirty yards that now separated us from the moving column.

"Stop! Stop, Bobby! Come back!" Sally screamed. Instantly she was running after him and so was I.

But already he was racing into the mouth of the tunnel, passing up the slower marchers. At once the invisible power was working its magic upon him. Even as he ran his head melted into steamy nothingness, his clothing became emptied of him, he was only a pair of legs, a pair of feet, running—running down that hall of whispers where forsaken clothing tumbled down a steep shaft.

"He's gone!" Sally cried, and in her frenzy she followed after him. She was a few steps ahead of me. I couldn't catch her.

But one of the leaders within the ranks, ready to prevent any stampeding, caught her hand and hurled her backward. As she was falling I caught her, clutched her tightly in my arms.

The marchers no doubt hurled insults at us, perhaps taking us for enemies, but I was oblivious. I bore Sally away from the scene as fast as I dared—yes, faster. My swimming head cost me; I fainted away as we reached the car.

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When the darkness passed away from my eyes I realized that Sally was driving me back to the city one of the longer ways around.

"Any time you wake up, Jim," she was saying, "you might relax that grip around my waist. I'll be quite safe, I promise."

## CHAPTER XIX

### Lightning Through the Fog

I WENT back to the hospital with a most heavy heart. My dreams of that night haunted me.

What was Bobby Hammock going through now? Nothing short of an intense love for the starry-eyed blonde could have made him race into that tunnel.

What of Sally's race to try to stop him? Could that have been anything less than love? Poor Sally. She must have liked him a lot—though I couldn't remember that they had ever appeared to be sweethearts.

My newspaper at lunch supplied the answer. It was a short feature story, sandwiched in between sensational reports of the great march, of the curious career of Bobby "Hammock," who was in reality Robert J. Barnes, *son of the Honorable Prescott Barnes!*

The other patients were talking about it and they were less astonished than I. It was not uncommon for the sons of nationally prominent men to dodge the spotlight and grow up incognito, they mentioned.

"The kid had ideas of his own before he got out of high school," they were saying. "He figured he'd get out of his father's limelight and live his own life . . . and see how the other half lived."

"Now he's seein' how they die."

"He used to be a dreamy youngster at home, they say, and his father didn't like it because he'd waste so much time lying out in the hammock gazing up at the clouds. So when he walked out he took the name Hammock."

"Wonder what his father thinks now?"

There it was again, I thought to myself—that child-like gloating over the tall thinking a person's loved ones are bound to do after he kicks the bucket. I couldn't help taking a nip at this talk.

"I'm sure Bobby Hammock didn't leave any misunderstandings with his father, gentlemen. They had a visit not long ago, and the Honorable Barnes made it possible for Bobbie to get a job."

"If you know all the answers, tell us whether these fifty million suckers will actually come back to life."

"They will," I said. "I think they will."

"That's a helluva lot of population to come bobbing up all at once." And this became the subject of a prolonged argument which, I thought, gave me my chance to amble back to my room before I let slip any more answers to such trenchant questions. But just as I was leaving someone popped another at me.

"See here, answer man, IF they all come back, which I very much doubt, what's Wurzelle going to do about it? You don't reckon he'll be any more anxious to let 'em live the next time than he has been, do you?"

"Maybe Wurzelle will know more by that time," I said.

BUT someone topped my remark with one that really set me thinking. "Maybe the fifty million rabble will know more too."

Well, I'm telling you I felt as unsettled as a flying fish lost in a bottomless fog. I supposed I'd go back to work

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after the hospital released me. But at present it was impossible to forget all the things that had upset the world. The loss of Bobby was plenty hard to take; and the whole shock of what I had seen was intensified by my friendship for him.

The last of the great death march came to me by television that afternoon in the hospital. The weird holocaust of the fifty million was done. From that hour forward it was a changed world. Over America the fog of moral confusion deepened.

The shocked state of the American mind and conscience can hardly be described.

Out of the general fog which was engulfing everyone, sharp bolts of lightning were soon to strike at Yours Truly, Jim Flinders. But before I start unloading my personal headaches I've got to say something about this nation-wide reaction that was already flooding the air-waves and the presses—America on the morning after—America with a terrific stomach-ache in her conscience.

Fifty million people had swept themselves off the map! It was enough to leave the rest of us stunned.

To me the nation seemed like a big stupid giant who awakens from a drunken dream to discover that he has cut his own arms off and thrown them away.

He tries to tell himself he doesn't need arms any more. He's fixed things up with so much automatic machinery that he can simply sit and enjoy comforts and take nourishment without ever moving a muscle.

Nevertheless those arms have been useful in the past, and he's more than a little astonished at himself for having done away with them.

All at once he gets a terrible premonition that he's doomed slowly to bleed to death.

"Why," he cries out, "did I do it?"

At once he tries to blame the arms themselves. But blame as he will, his blaming won't hold water. Both arms are gone, so it must be that his head or feet had something to do with it; and indeed it was the head—as he recalls from his dream—that had complained so much over the hanging on of useless arms.

The countless pictures of completely deserted cardboard villages and squatter jungles were full of pathos to all but the hardest-hearted of citizens.

IN THE weeks that were to follow, thousands of books were written on the subject. Millions of words of editorial comment contributed to the discussion. "Exodus" plays, movies, novels, biographies, philosophical treatises deluged the civilized world. Seldom were speeches or sermons delivered without making reference to the "Great American Exodus."

Most of the high and mighty of the nation's Capitol tried to glorify it as the noblest solution to the problem of a dependent and menacing population ever applied in the history of mankind. But millions of common people were shaken with such qualms of conscience that doctors were worked overtime caring for cases of nervous breakdown.

The medical journals had much to say about this wave of borderline illnesses; they found the symptoms most prevalent and the effects most devastating among the lower income groups. Apparently those thousands of insecure job holders who realized they had missed this temporary death march by a narrow margin were hardest hit. They felt helpless and therefore guilty. They would blame themselves for not protesting the government sanction, or for not contributing to a revolution, or perhaps for having voted for friends of Wurzelle.

The well-to-do and overfed citizens

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also often floundered in the bitter bath of conscience vinegar; however, they could dilute the bitterness with wines of merriment, and laugh and drink together to keep their courage up.

The Glass Capitol paid tribute to the fifty million departed.

Wurzelle and his party waved the flag of patriotism over the event, straining to make the public see it as a memorable sacrifice to restore the nation to her rightful heritage of good living.

Appropriations were granted for the holding of memorial services in every crossroads community. With the fat funds (mailed from the Goldfish Bowl of the Honorable Wurzelle) went the instructions that the speakers of these memorial services repeat the national promise: "A better America will await our departed ones *on their return* . . ." and there was another phrase added by Wurzelle: ". . . if they return."

The speakers were instructed to insert this clause in their speeches and make no further comment.

How the news cameras highlighted these words! I can see them now, whipping through my televisor with the evening news. The Great American Exodus was only four months old when the deft fingers of the Honorable Wurzelle began to write that mighty word *IF* into the promise.

Newscaster's comments? There were none. Voluntary censorship, if you want to call it that. Pressure from Wurzelle would be more accurate. The fifty million who had been ushered off with all the proofs and assurances that they would return in two years—three at the latest—would have groaned a groan that would have shaken down all the mountains if they had seen that little IF wedging into their fate.

STRANGE to say the public accustomed itself to the uncertainty.

A few voices like that of Verle Marble roared ominous overtones that berated the people for their fickleness. What was the meaning of that IF?

Simply this, said Verle Marble: Wurzelle was cajoling the nation into doubting the return so he could slide out from under his promise of bettering the nation during their absence.

But gradually the country, suffering with heartaches, began to doubt whether the promises of temporary death would ever be fulfilled.

As for bettering the nation the Council of Twelve "forgot."

And now to return to those personal bolts of lightning. In the very first week after the Exodus they came blasting down through the fog to knock all the social props out from under me and throw me back into the arms of Lord Temp.

It began forty-eight hours after Bobby left us.

A hospital orderly brought me a telephone and said it was my girl friend.

"Jim," came Sally's voice full of tears, "do you hate me terribly?"

"Hate you. I love you more than anything in the world. If I've neglected to mention it, it's because my identity has been a trifle shady—"

"Stop, Jim. Have you seen the papers? Do you know what they're saying? It was all my fault, Jim. I tried to tell father just *how* it happened—Bobby's sudden leap into temporary death. I forgot the reporters were listening in, picking up everything."

"I don't understand. What's upset you?"

"Father is raving with grief. And he thinks you were to blame. Honest, I didn't mean it that way."

I began to see daylight. Yes, my words had tipped the scales for Bobby. If I hadn't sworn that these people would return—

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"Father's in a terrible state, Jim. He's all torn up. That's why I'm warning you. And the reporters—they'll be after you. I hope you can tell them something that will comfort father. It's all so terrible. You know how Dad and I distrust SABA. Really, we can't believe that Bobby will ever come back."

"SABA be damned," I muttered. "You've got to believe *me*, anyhow."

"And your job, Jim. . . . Please remember me as a friend, Jim . . . I'm so sorry . . . Goodbye."

That was that. From the sound of that goodbye my relations with Prescott Barnes and family were about over. Bobby was gone, my job was gone, Sally was going!

## CHAPTER XX

### Vultures at Work

NO SLEEP for me that night.

I had prevailed upon the hospital to ward off the reporters with the statement that I was too sick to talk with anyone, that the loss of Bobby had cost me a relapse.

"A relapse it is, Mr. Flinders," the doctor said, studying me through serious eyes. "No communications or visitors."

"And if the Honorable Barnes sends notice that I've been fired, I'll be in no condition to receive it for at least a week."

"As you will," the doctor smiled.

My whole new world had caved in. At midnight I was tossing about in a fever. At one I got up and dressed. The night was murky outside my window. I paced the floor. I heard the far off bell that some Public Service Minister must have ordered to help steer a friend.

"I'll take a walk," I said to the orderly. "I need a little night air."

I strolled west. A fine drizzle filled the night's blackness. The moisture felt good against my face; my vigor was returning. I stopped for three or four coffees along Victory Boulevard. My steps kept taking me west.

By two in the morning I was climbing the slopes of the red crags. I took semi-shelter from the drizzle under an aspen. The city lights spread before me were dimmed out by the weather.

"I'm seeing my own fade-out," I said to myself, and for the first time I made a great admission. *"I need Lord Temp."*

A ball of luminous gray steam circled through the black fog and approached me, taking on the shape of four white horses drawing a chariot. Hoofs clattered to a stop on the rocky slope, then pounded off into the blackness.

"Not a fit night out for flesh or bones," said the skeleton as he sauntered up to me, his metatarsals clacking with each step. "Flinders, I've missed you. Too bad your were laid up for the big show."

"You know everything, don't you?" I shook hands with him. The sprinkling of sparks lighted his grinning yellow skull and the fine raindrops clinging to his red robe.

"Yes, I get around," said Lord Temp.

The great march had filled him with an exultant spirit and he was eager to talk about his success. For him America had really come through.

"SABA really carried the ball for you," I commented. "Vetto was the man you needed, all right. Not me."

"Yes and no," said Lord Temp. "I know you *think* your heart isn't in this deal. I've overheard some of your delirious mumblings in the hospital. Oh, yes, I've dropped in frequently—without my robes, of course."

"And you heard me mumbling?"

"Don't be troubled about it. You've

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been a worthwhile experiment. As for this SABA magician—"

THE slight hum of vibrating bones told me that Lord Temp had shuddered at the thought of Vetto.

"A very hard man to work with," he went on. "I never knew any top ranking financier to be quite so stingy. Not satisfied to coin millions on my power. He wants all the credit too. Come, let's drop over and see what he's cooking up."

"There was something I wanted to ask you, Lord Temp. I'm on a spot—"

"Later, Flinders."

The chariot came along and conveyed us to the top of the SABA mansion. The horses chased away, and we crawled along the tiled roof till we reached the inset tower. The skeleton hooked one arm over the crenelated edge and the other around me and let me down so that the purple light was in my face. Cautiously I slid the window open a few inches.

Voices welled up through the tower from the conference table below. Loudest was the Mussolini-snarl of Gravelli Vetto.

"Full power? Most certainly I possess the full power. Who else but me? For thousands of years SABA has awaited a man of superhuman strength. I am that man. I am the Mahdi of SABA. Is there any power I don't possess?".

It was Wurzelle who answered. I could see that the two of them were alone. From this angle Wurzelle's pine-sliver hair and eager shoulders were an almost perfect enlargement of a miniature I had once seen in a rectangle of black glass.

"It's high time you cut me in on this, Gravelli. You sing sweet, all right, and the people fall for it. But I'm a practical man. I've proved that already."

"SABA sees all, believes all, Mr. Wurzelle."

"You can drop your purple accents, pal. There's something SABA hasn't seen yet."

"What could that be?"

"It could be a scheme in my head that would earn SABA more millions than you've ever counted."

"SABA believes all," said Gravelli Vetto in a voice that made the window tremble. "Your scheme?"

"You're going to decipher a volume of ancient SABA writings," said Wurzelle, "that contains a lot of new and important predictions. Get your helpers on the job right away."

"Doing what?"

"Manufacturing said volume of secrets five thousand years old."

Wurzelle produced some papers and Vetto became absorbed in them.

The blood was rushing to my head by this time and the ground was a long way down. The guy who invented the word eaves-dropping had most likely fallen from a spot like this.

"I'm getting sick, Lord Temp," I whispered. "Pull me back."

"Sure thing—but that gives you a rough idea how these vultures are working."

WE crawled the tile roof again and signaled to the approaching horses to make a soft landing. Again the best of taxi service; he took me all the way back to the hospital and we pulled up short on the rain-soaked parking beside the ambulance drive. (The gardener would mutter oaths over those mysterious hoof-tracks for days afterward).

"See you later, Flinders. Keep your temperature down."

"Lord Temp, have you forgotten? I came to you tonight to ask you a favor."

"What'll it be? More redbacks? That's easy."

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"I want you to bring someone back to life for me," I said. "Reach into your realm of temporary death and get my friend Bobby Hammock."

"Hammock? Why does he want to come back?"

"He's not asking it. I'm asking it."

"He won't be ready," said Lord Temp. "I'd figured to hold these folks two years at least."

"Ask him to get ready, as a favor to me. If you want someone to take his place I'll go. Or if that doesn't pay the bill you can even rub me out if you need to. But bring him back."

Lord Temp's jaws slowly fell apart as I made my plea. Then he snapped them shut and tossed his skull cockily.

"No exchange necessary. But this is irregular. It won't happen often."

I was on the verge of asking for the starry-eyed girl friend, but Lord Temp cracked his whip and charioted away.

By the following noon the news was already all over the country.

*Bobby Hammock had reappeared. He was at his father's house, safe and sound.*

## CHAPTER XXI

### Romance in the Dog House

WHAT caused Bobby Hammock to come back to life?

The answer to that mystery came to Sally and Mr. Barnes straight from Bobby's own lips. It was an answer which, luckily for me, never reached the newspapers.

*"Jim Flinders did it for me."*

When I heard that I knew Bobby had thought his honesty would be a favor to me. Plenty swell of him. When Mr. Barnes finally got through to me at the hospital to phone me all the good news I was sure my stock was going up like your thermometer in a summer sun.

"How's Bobby feeling? Any worse for the wear and tear?" I asked.

There was a note of uncertainty in Prescott Barnes' tone. "He'll all right, I think. Pretty solemn, though. He'll talk with you later, he says . . . No, he won't say a word about what he's been through. The reporters gave up asking him. He's very silent."

"Everyone's glad to have him back, I'm sure," I said, adding significantly, "Sally and everyone."

"Of course, of course. And again, Mr. Flinders, my heartiest thank-you until you're better paid."

I tried to hold on to that telephone conversation. I wanted to get my job back. I wanted to talk with Bobby. Most of all I wanted to know that everything had been squared with Sally.

Another bolt of lightning was being forged with my name on it. But as yet I simply didn't realize what I'd done.

When the doctor sent me merrily on my way two days later I spent a sunshiny hour watching traffic spin around the plaza and then drifted over to the Bureau of Biographical Records. I was curious to see what could be found on Bobby "Hammock" Barnes, and how he had gotten away with an incognito.

I was out of luck. The files were overcrowded. Reporters and professional SABA researchers and others were fairly snatching for dope on both Bobby "Hammock" and his former self, Robert Barnes. Yes, there were cumulative records on the lives of each of his names but until this event the Bureau had kept secret the identity of these two.

All perfectly legal, of course. Bobby had long ago been granted "anonymity rights," as many persons were who were justified in escaping something from their past. It might be a father's spotlight, as in Bobby's case; or a criminal past that had been outgrown; or even

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one's own famous name that made it impossible for him to get around peacefully.

Before leaving I decided to take another look at the materials on my own past that I'd never examined closely. What events of my career, I wondered, had anyone bothered to record?

"Those boxes have been checked out, sir," said the librarian.

"Oh-oh." My instinct told me to beat a quick retreat. I was too slow. A voice captured me on the spot.

"Jim. Jim Flinders. You're just the one I wanted to see."

"Sally! It's a small world. I was just leaving. I have an appointment."

"With a cup of coffee, I suppose." Sally caught me by the hand. "Come back to our library booth, Jim. I want to ask you some questions."

AS I took a seat I noticed that her her slender fingers were tapping nervously on the study table. She was looking across at me with Sally Hart's accusing gray eyes, the steady inquiring look that had found guilt or near-guilt in me back in the days of my awful youth.

Sally began to talk and she was darned sweet, considering what she had to say. She was a trifle more tactful than her great-great-great-great grandmother would have been, and less stubborn. But the whole deal was a bitter pill for her as well as me, that was plain.

"I'm afraid, Jim, that when I know all the truth about you I'm not going to like it one bit. But I can't go on being a friend to you till I know."

Sometimes she was biting her lips to hold back tears, I was sure; but she went after the truth as if her faith in life itself depended on it.

She thanked me with all her heart for turning her back from the death tunnel that time she had tried to catch Bobby. And she thanked me for somehow bringing Bobby back. But now her face grew grave.

*"What are you, Jim Flinders, that you could do this?"*

"I'm not a SABA magician, if that's what you mean."

"What *are* you that you seem to have come through a century and a half—to have known Sally Hart long ago—to have come into my life almost miraculously, to haunt me—"

*"Do* I haunt you, Sally? If I make life unpleasant for you, tell me and I'll—"

"I didn't say that, Jim. I've liked you—you must know that—I've liked you a lot. But Sally Hart—I can't help thinking of her—I know she loved you too—"

"Did you say *too?"*

"I mean—she must have built all her aircastles around you just as—as anyone under those circumstances might do. And then—" Sally shook her head slowly. *"Are* you what my superstitious old grandmother thought? A wandering spirit? A spirit of evil that drops in to do mischief and then soars away? Are you? . . . I've got to know."

If ever in my life I tried to be scrupulously truthful that was the moment: "I wish I knew, Sally, believe me. I wish I could tell you all the answers. All I know is that I once got lifted off an experimental space ship and tossed through time to be dropped into this age. It wasn't any thing I planned. I didn't ask for it."

"You were the victim of some evil power?"

"The victim of an experiment by the Lord of Temporary Death. Whoever he is, he's timeless. He comes and goes through the ages. And now he has come to this age to try his great plan—"

"What hold does he have on you?"

"That's hard to answer. Probably a

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stronger grip than I've ever had on myself. You see we've knocked around together quite a little since I took off in 1950. I've talked his plans over with him."

"Don't you realize what evil he must represent, upsetting the whole nation this way? Can't you see it's your duty to break away from him?"

I COULDN'T answer. This was the very confusion of purposes that had haunted me from the first. Lord Temp was an agreeable sort of fellow; and for all his upsetting the nation and bringing heartaches to a lot of people and headaches to everyone, how did I know but what he might have something? It was like he said: up to now there has just been birth, life, and death. But *maybe* this temporary death, coming in to break the drabness of some lives, would prove to be a useful thing.

I expressed this uncertainty to Sally. "We can't know until his experiment has had a chance."

"You don't *want* to break away from him!" Sally said, and her lips quivered and her eyes seemed to look through me. I felt cold chills race to my fingertips.

"I don't know whether I *could*," I replied. "And even if I could—I don't know—maybe I wouldn't want to unless I was sure—"

My "unless" was lost for the dam of Sally's emotions burst and she was in tears. What she said to me as I followed her down the winding staircase and through the library hallway added up to walking papers for me, no further translation necessary.

"I'm going away, Jim, and you needn't try ever to see me again," she sobbed. And then as we paused between the marble pillars at the entrance she brushed the tears away and tried to speak in her frank friendly manner. "I didn't want to take the trip with father. He's going abroad soon—he and Leon. But I'll have to go now. Goodbye, Jim."

"Sally—wait. There's something I want to give you. I've been carrying it all this time. It's an old snapshot of Sally Hart."

I took it from my billfold and handed it to her.

"Thank you, Jim . . . Oh!" She was looking at something else in my billfold. "So *you* have it. Yes, *that's* it—the missing card from that beautiful pack Sally Hart left. May I?"

Her slim fingers reached to draw the card from my open billfold. She gave a little gasp of surprise. This card was slightly different. Into the picture of Sally Hart was blended that other picture, the chariot, the four white horses, Lord Temp.

And Sally Barnes was asking me to give it to her!

"No, no, no, my dear young lady," came a reply from someone much quicker on the trigger than I. A swirl of red appeared from behind the pillar at Sally's left, and up stepped the gleaming yellow skeleton, a highly polished and brilliant figure indeed in broad daylight. His rattly voice frightened Sally—or maybe it was the shock of seeing him face to face for the first time.

She dropped the card—and his arm bones flashed to catch it up before it struck the steps.

"You couldn't possibly have any use for it, Miss Barnes. I'll take it. Thank you. Good day."

Sally, bless her heart, fainted right in my arms. Darned sweet of her They couldn't take that moment away from me, even though Leon King and another boy friend did arrive a minute latter to lead her away from me. Away, as I was fully convinced, forever.

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## CHAPTER XXII

### New Year's Murder

THE assassination of Verle Marble, the venerable Executive Secretary of the federal government, was one of the boldest and most dastardly crimes in the history of the world.

I saw that murder happen. Millions of people saw it. Television carried it to the eyes of the world at the very second it happened. And yet no one but the murderer himself knew what was taking place.

It happened during the first hour of the year 2101 while the New Year's Eve parties were at their height the country over. No party was receiving so much attention as that of the Goldfish, who were celebrating in the Orchid Room of the Glass Capitol.

I was paying very slight attention to the broadcast until an announcer remarked that a secret service official had just fallen asleep at his post in the midst of the mad gaiety and music and chasing about of hilarious big shots and shotesses in masquerade.

When a secret service officer falls asleep at a party there's something wrong.

The next ominous sign was the passing chatter that there was some bad drink being served. But this talk caused no alarm at the time. The orchestra was putting on a hot show that was attracting everyone's attention and the announcer turned our vision toward the stage. A clarinet player and a comedian with a live pig in his arms were standing in front of the orchestra having a contest to see which one could produce the loudest squeal.

I laid my book aside. (I had been passing a lonely New Year's Eve in my own room, turning through a volume by a spaceship engineer, an expert theorist on possible invasions from other planets.) Now I turned my full attention to this party. The nation's great were thronged around the stage, and near the rear of the crowd with his back toward the televisor stood the Honorable Verle Marble.

The trained pig was winning the loudest applause, but the torture-meter indicated that the clarinet was making the worst noise. The contest went into the third chorus and then it happened.

A very rotund clown dressed in a black suit and cap and a white clown mask, and obviously stuffed with all the pillows his suit would hold, drifted into the scene from the left and skirted along the outer edge of the crowd. As later investigations proved, this disguised person had not been seen before by anyone.

At this moment Verle Marble turned, somewhat disturbed to notice that a second secret service officer had grown so drowsy he was being led off to one side by a friend.

Then our masked clown gave Marble a friendly slap on the arm. For an interval of five or six seconds these two might be seen exchanging unequal greetings. Marble's heavy eyebrows lifted questioningly; he didn't know who the clown was—but there was the offer of a handshake and Marble took it.

THEN the clown shuffled out of the scene and Verle Marble stood in his tracks clutching his hand as if it pained him. The television announcer rushed over to him and seemed to be asking if anything was wrong. You couldn't hear a word against that orchestra tumult. The clarinetist had gone wild and the squealing pig had given up.

The contest ended, the crowd cheered and began to unpack from its sardine formation around the stage, and then people began to take notice of Marble.

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He was clutching his arm in pain, his knees were letting him down, he was sinking to the floor.

As millions of television spectators like myself must have noticed, Marble's old enemy Wurzelle crowded in, saw what was happening, suddenly lost his boisterous laugh, and lent a hand to keep Marble from falling to the floor.

The announcer fought his way back to his television receptor and tried to follow up this amazing occurrence. But the mad confusion that followed revealed little.

Fifteen minutes later the news became more coherent. The world learned that officers were on the trail of a mystery man who had just played clown at the government party. We learned that that trail led to the southwest toward the old tungsten mines—the new Necropolis, as it was now being called.

A few minutes later the shocking news came through: Verle Marble was dead—dead from a potent poison that had entered his bloodstream through his hand and arm.

No man was ever apprehended for that crime. SABA offered the protection of a master stroke of falsehood, as I shall relate presently.

The officers who gave chase to a fleeing suspect made their failure public an hour later. They had missed their man. They declared that he had escaped the city in an autoplane and *had flown straight into the open mouth of one of the old mines.*

In other words, the assassin had escaped, so they declared, into the realm of Temporary Death.

It was an ingenious way out. No one could disprove the story. The ruins of the autoplane might be lying in a heap somewhere inside the mine, but no one was going to walk in and see; for it had been proved that the forces of melting still operated at the Necropolis gates.

Somebody had lied. The assassin didn't make his escape in this way, I know. A certain skeleton told me. You see Lord Temp happened to be riding around the gateways to the Necropolis and later he assured me that no one had come around to accept the blessings of temporary death that night.

The assassination of a great and noble man takes some of the heart and soul out of a nation, and makes its good people hold tighter to whatever they love and respect. When Prescott Barnes and Sally flew back to attend Marble's funeral rites there was much agitation among right-thinking people in favor of turning the reins of the nation over to Barnes.

"Not at this time," Barnes replied to the press. "As long as a secret society has a chokehold on the country I wouldn't have a chance. But if I live long enough I hope to explode SABA to atoms. I'll be absent from the Glass Capitol for a year or more studying in Europe."

"Studying what?" the reporters asked.

"Two very important subjects," the Honorable Barnes told them. "First, the fakery and crimes of SABA. Second, what can be done to prepare America for the return of fifty million citizens?"

WITH that brief hint of his future plans Barnes flew back to Europe and Sally went with him.

Occasional newspaper accounts told of their comings and goings, and I read every scrap eagerly. Prescott Barnes didn't know it but he wasn't through with me. If he was going to explode SABA to atoms there were certain things I could do to help *anonymously.*

The newspapers told of his rejoining "the brilliant young politician," Leon King, who had not returned for the recent state funeral. There were stories

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of Leon King's debut as a young American lecturer, of his accompanying Sally Barnes to a national celebration in Spain, of the threats which Barnes received from SABA-paid thugs in Italy.

Next came a pointed story that Leon King had made a speech expressing a tolerance toward SABA. Observers noted that he might be drawing away from the influence of Prescott Barnes.

Why the split? "Because there are SABA thugs in Italy," one sarcastic editorial jibed. "Leon King may be traveling on the Honorable Barnes' money. He may have risen to prominence through Barnes' influence. He may be planning to marry Barnes' daughter. But if there are beatings in store for the enemies of SABA, young Mr. King would like it known that he is independent of Barnes' political and moral convictions."

The world held its breath when Prescott Barnes and daughter were reported to be visiting in Egypt. What would happen if they met Gravelli Vetto there? Yes, Vetto was still sojourning in Egypt. He had gone there just two weeks before the close of the year.

On that memorable New Year's Eve of Verle Marble's assassination it was believed that Gravelli Vetto could not be reached with the shocking news because he had taken himself into a deep tomb full of hieroglyphics, deciphering mysteries of the early SABA prophets.

Then Prescott Barnes and Sally were back in Italy again, and the newspaper anticipations of a meeting of enemies in Egypt never came.

The headline that did come from Egypt was as transparent as Vetto's claim to genius. The instant I read it I knew it was of Vetto's own making:

"MARBLE'S FATE FORECAST BY SABA, FIVE CENTURIES AGO."

Yes, indeed! The Egyptian members of SABA who died five centuries ago knew all about the coming of Temporary Death. They had written in timeless hieroglyphics the dire prophecy. The first nation to be visited by Temporary Death would sacrifice its leader to Permanent Death.

"These events were inevitable," Gravelli Vetto wrote back to America. "I am duty bound to warn the men of the government that the murderer of Verle Marble *must not be sought out and punished.* Whoever did the deed, he was but fulfilling the ancient prophecy.

"SABA sees all, believes all.

"The reason for this seemingly cruel assassination may never be revealed, but SABA knows it was necessary."

Necessary! That was a bitter laugh. The reason for the cruel assassination became apparent within a month: In a special election the Honorable Wurzelle got himself elected to the office of Executive Secretary.

Vetto rocketed back to America to officiate at a showy SABA reception and dinner, 500 redbacks a plate.

The irony of it. With one hand SABA had sanctioned the murder of the common man's best friend. With the other it had ushered the common man's worst enemy into the position of highest power and placed its blessing upon him.

"Thieves of a feather flock together," I growled, talking these matters over with my red-robed friend.

"But not so cozy as you'd think," said Lord Temp. "You should hear them scrapping over the incoming millions. Take it from an old-time eavesdropper, they're heading for a break."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### Scouts in the Sky

"*TO THOSE anonymous contributors who have been sending ma-*

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*terial to my father to aid the fight against SABA, our sincerest thanks. Sally Barnes. Vienna."*

It was a small item in the personals column but to my hungry soul it weighed more than the biggest headlines of the week. Yes, more than all the headlines from the assassination of Verle Marble to the first hint of an impending invasion of Martians.

The message assured me that what I was doing for Prescott Barnes was being appreciated. That's all I wanted to know.

He and Sally needn't know that I was the one doing it. Ostensibly I had played my hand with them and lost. But as long as I remained anonymous I could still express my feelings in this one little service: sending letters full of inside information on their enemies.

I didn't lack for information. Lord Temp was making a game of eavesdropping these weeks, having a wonderful time listening to his two credit usurpers divide the spoils of Temporary Death between them and hatch up new plans for hoaxing the public.

I couldn't be quite so gleeful about it. I was never certain just what Lord Temp was made of or what the limits of his powers might be. *Suppose someone should decide to melt him down.* Would they find him made of tough fiber? Or was he exactly what he appeared to be, a few pounds of dry chemicals plus a liberal quantity of conversational steam?

I knew he didn't care to walk into the path of a ray gun. Beyond this I had little or no measure of his limitations. But I didn't feel happy about the chances he took. He was just about the only friend I had left.

What of Bobby Hammock? Well, that young venturer into realms of temporary death simply was not himself.

My letters to him had come back unopened. It looked as if I had not befriended him, but only his family, in bringing him back.

ONE day I met him on the street. He greeted me quietly and we stepped into a sandwich shop.

"I've burned all my bridges, Jim," he said, gazing dreamily at the ceiling. "No, I'm not working anywhere. Haven't quite settled down yet . . . How do I spend my time? Just roaming around, thinking what a funny world it is with everybody gone. Sometimes I walk out to the old jungle grounds."

"Not everybody's gone, Bobby," I said, trying to bring a little good cheer to the surface. "You know there are still millions of the world's finest. There's your father—and Sally—"

"They thanked you for bringing me back, didn't they, Jim? . . . It was mighty decent of you, for their sakes."

"Look here, Bobby," I said, half angered by what I took to be a resentful attitude. "If you're a fish out of water—but I know what's your trouble. I should have rescued your pretty blonde, too. Well, the Lord of Temporary Death clamped down on me."

"I'm not complaining," said Bobby. "Maybe everything's for the best."

"Huh? You two didn't quarrel, did you?"

"Quarrel? No, no, no. Everything was all right when I left."

"Tell me what it was like."

"I can't tell you anything."

"Was there any torture?"

"Not that I remember."

"Did you get turned into animals—eagles or bats or something?"

"What an outlandish idea, Jim Flinders. There were fifty million of us. Don't you think your Lord Temp got past his silly experimenting before he started in on that number?"

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"You're dissatisfied to be out, Bobby." I emphasized my challenge by tapping the table to each word. "Why don't you walk straight back to the mine door and melt yourself over?"

"After all the trouble you had getting me out? After all the fuss my father and sister made? After that field day the reporters had ballyhooing over my return?"

"Reporters and the rest of us be damned. If you want to go back I'll promise you we won't interfere again."

A funny look came into Bobby Hammock Barnes' eyes—just a hint of the old snap and sparkle. Instantly he suppressed it in favor of the chill deadpan.

But I followed through and crowded him into a corner, conversationally speaking, and made him give. Not much but a little.

"Sorry, Jim, I just can't talk to you," he said. "I've burned all my bridges just because I don't dare talk with anyone. I'm walking dynamite . . . I'll go now. Some day I'll call you."

"I'll count on it, Bobby. Don't forget."

"One thing more, Jim. Have you any news from Sally? . . . No? You don't know whether she's married?"

"The last news I saw, she and Leon King were taking in a concert in Vienna. Leon was scheduled up for some lectures on the hidden truths of SABA."

"So *he's* flopping!" Bobby snorted. "One of these days you'll hear that *I've* gone SABA too." And with a curious laugh Bobby Hammock strode away.

WEEK after week I combed the newspapers for news of Sally or her father. And there were a few other matters I continually sifted out: The implied evils of SABA. The scientific news on any and all types of rocket ships. Theorists of space travel following in the wake of one eccentric J. Collier Gleidermann of 1950.

Have I mentioned that there were occasional reports about the possibilities of Martian visitors? Americans had been talking of such things for longer than I could remember. But now that rocket ships were used for continent-to-continent hops, the world was convinced that space travel would come.

There were unidentified ships in the sky on three or four different dates before the anniversary of the murder of Verle Marble.

Telescopic photographs did not reveal much detail, but authorities agreed that such ships had never been seen before. The nations grew uneasy and sent messenger ships to try to make contact; but the visitors lost them high above the stratosphere. It was assumed that these newcomers had chased back to Mars, or possibly Venus.

"They may have achieved their purpose." Such unsatisfactory comments from the authorities of international rocket lines were supposed to content the public. "They may be surveying the solar system for scientific purposes."

Soon after the new year a telescopic photograph of five ships thirty-five miles above Moscow revealed a curious doughnut design with flaps for air locomotion.

In February these errant space birds were seen above central United States. From then on no other country reported any further sight of them. If any nation had cause to be alarmed it was America.

We should have been in a panic of fear. But the easy life in this country had buried our imaginations in soft cushions. Wurzelle and his government had made the country believe everything was perfect. Nothing must be changed or disturbed. The automatic

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machinery would keep us going. All we had to do was keep repairing or replacing our machines. We had reached the goal of all of man's centuries of climbing.

And in supreme ignorance or stubborn blindness Wurzelle led the country to believe that our legal safeguards of peace were so tight that we could never be molested by any enemy.

Now came the thundered warning from across the seas: "If America should be attacked by other-world invaders, *how can she fight back?*

*"Where will she find the strength to defend herself?"*

That challenging thunder came from Prescott Barnes. He followed through with a charge that shook the ground beneath every American's feet.

"OUR STRENGTH HAS FLOWN. We have sent it into Temporary Death. If an attack upon us is now in the making our only hope is to delay that attack until our fifty million return.

"Within two months our population *may* march back to us from the chambers of their two-year rest.

"On the other hand, they MAY NEVER RETURN.

"But *if they do*—have we made ready to receive them? Has the Wurzelle government so much as turned a finger to prepare the country for their return? No! It would seem that Wurzelle expects them to pick up their old life in the cardboard jungles.

"Listen to me, America. This is no idle vision. Enemies CAN pounce upon us, for we are defenseless.

"Let us pray that our departed fifty million will come back—and soon. And let us be ready to recognize them for their true worth!"

There was a blast that should have shattered the whole Wurzelle government like so much thin glass.

For the awful truth was this: Wurzelle and Gravelli Vetto had fixed things to their own taste. They had arranged that THOSE FIFTY MILLION WOULD *NEVER* COME BACK.

Yes, they had taken action to murder those fifty million in cold blood.

I had seen it happen. With my own eyes I had watched Wurzelle's men fill the mines with poisonous gas and seal the doors.

Under more favorable circumstances I would have radioed Prescott Barnes without delay. I would have shouted this atrocious crime to the high heavens. But I could not. For I was now behind bars and under constant guard, a prisoner of the *Honorable* Wurzelle.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### Bombs Over the Goldfish Bowls

BOBBY had been true to his word and had called me. We had trudged out over the snow-filled mountain roads on that February night. Just before the night closed in on us we reached the entrances of the old tungsten mines. Steel doors had been built to close the Necropolis to the public. I tried to peer through the small circular windows. But Bobby assured me they weren't windows.

We ducked back out of sight when the eight big autoplane tankers came zooming down out of the dark sky.

They showered their lights through falling snow and sought out the wide roadway that had been, nearly two years ago, the end of the great Exodus. Soon they leveled off and came down for smooth landings. Each tanker wheeled up to a mine entrance. This apparently had become an efficient routine. The pilots flashed on the spotlights and proceeded to drag some hose from their tankers.

We weren't in the most advantageous

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position to see. They had taken Bobby by surprise by coming so early. As for myself, up to this moment I was still wondering what they were up to.

I followed Bobby along the edge above the graded road. The mountain climbing was perilous. We should have been below. Suddenly I slipped in the snow and went down the slope, arms forward, and almost hit the edge of a beam of light before I recovered my feet and scrambled for cover.

Two spotlights leaped across to the nearest knoll. Bobby was on one side of those lights, I on the other. They began to comb back and forth, and I backtracked in a hurry. Bobby must have been making tracks in the other direction or lying low behind a rock. The watchers hadn't seen him. They were after me. But they must have known there were two of us. Our snow tracks hadn't had time to fill.

Now I worked my way back, and for a few breathless minutes was free to see the whole crew at work. Each tanker was forcing compressed gas into a mine entrance. Huge flexible metal hoses had been attached to the valves in the metal doors—those circular glass "windows."

What I was seeing and what few hints I'd caught from Bobby added up to a plan of permanent death for fifty million persons.

This, I knew at once, was the joint inspiration of Vetto and Wurzelle. Would it work? I went sick with horror at the thought. Would any man ever know what a holocaust was taking place within this mountain at this very moment?

Yes, it was a routine job to these crafty Wurzelle crewmen. They were at it every night, increasing the pressure with every hour of work, to make sure that no recesses within the labyrinth of tunnels escaped the poison.

Other than the crews at work there were these extra men who couldn't be anything more nor less than a plain-clothes army. They were roving around with flashlights.

JUST as I thought I was safe three of them came upon me with flashlights. I didn't have time to think of running.

I did my best to look innocent. I pointed down to the tankers in the roadway.

"Hi, fellows," I said. "Gee, didja see what they're doin' down there? They must be givin' the dead ones a change of air."

The biggest of the three men nudged the others; they approached casually. They were noticing that I wasn't armed. I tried to play a gawky tourist who had just come up to see the sights. The big guy barked at me.

"What happened to the other one? Which way did he go?"

I hesitated for a moment. "Er—that way. South, ain't it?"

They didn't suppose I had told the truth, so they followed the fast-filling tracks northward, taking me along.

"Anything wrong?" I asked.

"Not a thing," said the big guy. "Nice night you picked to see sights. But we'll give you a ride back to town."

They gave me a ride back to town, and put me in a nice warm prison lined with steel bars. If my sense of direction served me, this oversized telephone booth was in the third level below the glass dome of the plaza's busiest Goldfish Bowl—Wurzelle's.

There I removed my sopping wet shoes and socks and wrung them out and baked my feet against the register and wondered if Bobby had got away. When I got thawed out I entertained myself trying to see who came and went through these offices. But they set up

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an old yellow folding screen in front of my bars, and I saw nothing. I slept.

With daylight I discovered that the office workers who surrounded Wurzelle weren't too surprised to learn that the old "chimp cage" was in use. They spoke of me as a Rocky Mountain Tourist, and wondered where I'd be moved next. (It seemed that Wurzelle ran a small jail business on the side and commanded the pick of the nation's thugs.)

My prison was not without a certain charm of its own. Three meals a day and a delightful view, thanks to the rotunda-like construction of the building.

Two walls of mirrors higher up brought me a nice patch of blue sky from somewhere east of the city.

For several days I was fed and cared for but not questioned. Everyone was so very busy.

Then came an unusual day.

At ten o'clock the sun came down to greet me.

At eleven o'clock the mystery ships —a whole fleet of them—moved into my patch of sky and I knew something was up.

At twelve o'clock sirens sounded and the office force all sought some lower and supposedly bomb-proof level. I stayed on the third.

THE fleet, I learned at three o'clock in the afternoon, passed squarely over the Glass Capitol. It soared off into space, out of range of the adventurous squadron of volunteer space flivvers that tried to make contact.

Since no communication had been established whatsoever the lethargic nation was reluctant to condemn these mystery ships as warlike; nevertheless it was thought expedient to sound sirens throughout the whole surrounding countryside.

From three o'clock on the government plaza was a scene of uproarious tumult such as no capitol in the world since the days of world wars. The whole nation was calling in, radioing, wiring, pouring lobbyists, governors, and ambassadors of great business houses into the roaring vortex. The whole angry country suddenly demanded to know why there was no national defense ready to meet these anonymous trespassers.

(No one stopped to argue the legal question, how close may space ships come without trespassing?)

Even the SABA wires grew hot with the mutterings of one Gravelli Vetto, who was supposed to know all the answers, but was losing his temper asking questions. Was the government asleep? Weren't there any government ships to handle this job?

"AMERICA," the headlines screamed, "HAS BEEN CAUGHT WITH HER SPACE SHIPS DOWN!"

The volunteer flivvers performed one service which quickened the general terror but at least helped to clear the fogs of uncertainty. They returned with some color photographs of the space prowlers, America's first close-ups of these new creatures. Being uncertain whether they were from Mars, Venus, or some remoter planet, the news reports slapped the name "Sky Bandits" under the picture.

And so the gasping world took its first amazed look, that evening, at the color reproductions of weird man-like creatures with scarlet faces and black and white checkered scales instead of hair, and muscular bare arms and legs of scarlet. The pictures revealed bravery and intelligence in those bold-featured faces—faces that gazed down through the transparent floors of doughnut-shaped ships or that remained fixed upon elaborate instrument boards that

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glinted with the pale sunlight.

I heard Wurzelle snarling late that night—the sound came to me through a television set in the next room, for Wurzelle had closed himself in his private office on the second level. He was ordering his whole staff to get their heads together and help him counter the thrusts of his most dangerous enemy.

Yes, Prescott Barnes was making his voice heard from across the Atlantic.

"Why is the United States not prepared for this impending crisis? Why isn't it mobilizing its manpower this very minute?"

And again later that night. "The public is entitled to action from the government at once. The probable destruction which threatens the capitol *must be delayed.* We must make time to build fighting space ships. We must make time for the return of our outcast workers, the fifty million people we thought we didn't need."

FOR approximately seventy-two hours I sat in my prison cell, all but forgotten, and took in the passing show. Two more days brought two more flights of the space bandits over us. Wurzelle's headquarters had about as soothing effect on your nerves as brushing your teeth with a buzzsaw.

With each new wail of the sirens some more offices would move bag and baggage down to lower and safer levels. Government Plaza Guards would hastily survey all the black-glass reflectors at dark to make sure the upper levels of the Goldfish Bowls were cleared. Then the plaza and the whole city would make a frenzied effort to blackout.

By daylight SABA sent a small fleet of outmoded rocket ships into the air, crates that had done continent-to-continent service ten years ago. All eighteen of them came down to forced landings with all their electrically operated dials "frozen." The enemy obviously had some tricks that could paralyze us.

Another morning brought me my personal surprise of the week.

Whose voice should I hear outside my folding screen but that of Bobby Hammock Barnes!

"Yes, I heard you had a prisoner. Vetto sent me over to relieve you. Give me three men. I'll take him in charge. We have plenty of facilities at SABA headquarters."

The official must have replied that there were no three men available; SABA would have to furnish its own escort. Then Bobby drew himself up boldly. "All right, I'll handle him myself. I've got a trusty ray gun. Did you ever prove anything on him? . . . No? You haven't even learned his name. Well, leave him to us. If he knows anything he shouldn't, SABA will bring it out."

Bobby Hammock pushed the screen aside, narrowed his eyes at me, gripped his ray gun, and ordered someone to open the barred door.

"Keep three paces ahead of me, fellow," Bobby snapped. "We're taking a taxi to SABA. All right. Get along."

We taxied deep into the business district and stopped at a newsstand. Bobby turned to me.

"See you again some time, stranger. Any messages for Gravelli Vetto? . . . Sure I've turned SABA. Ask no questions unless you're prepared to pay the fee."

I stood on the curb and watched him taxi away.

The sudden turn in my fate left me as happy as a schoolboy whose teacher is called away on examination day. I bought all the newspapers I'd missed and hurried to my room, and combed them for news of Sally.

Here it was, a three column headline:

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BARNES WILL RETURN THIS WEEK.

Former Council Member Amazed at American Apathy. Declares He Is Ready to Grapple With Problems of National Defense.

And half way down the column, "He and his daughter Sally will rocket back to the United States Saturday . . ."

This was Friday. It was more than Friday, it was *the* night.

At midnight the first bomb dropped out of the skies. It struck the geometric center of the government plaza —the Goldfish Bowl of the Honorable Wurzelle.

## CHAPTER XXV

### Panic

THE blast shook the city and I'll never forget what followed.

At the time I was in my lounging robe with a heap of newspapers on my lap, the television radio on my left, a globe on my right. The discussions of swift diplomatic efforts by Wurzelle had filled the air. He was scraping to get foreign countries to lend their fighting ships. The neighbor nations had snarled, *No!* And then—

WHAMMMMMM! Blommmmmmm —broooooffff—blunnnnngg!

The globe jumped off the table and I caught the radio as it was falling. A moment later I was racing out of the rooming house in bedroom slippers, robe, and topcoat. Down the street I saw the plaza. A blaze of fire was welling up like an angry volcano. Glass was melting and spilling down like paraffin into the inferno.

Officers yelled at everybody to take cover. Sirens were screaming and the fire was crackling like the Fourth of July.

The plaza, actually a broad turtleback roof over innumerable government offices, had been struck squarely through one of its Goldfish Bowls. The bomb had plummeted deep.

The firemen must have been on their job below as well as above. The blazes were surrounded and within a few minutes the inferno was transformed into smoking black ruins.

Elbowing through the excited throngs I ambled to my rooming house, stopping here and there to recover a lost bedroom slipper. Amid the loud talking I picked up a detail that struck home.

"They're sure good shots," this fellow yelled. "You know whose Goldfish Bowl they hit? *Wurzelle's!*"

I gulped. There but for the grace of Bobby would I have been.

HEADLINES were being shouted through the streets within the hour.

"CAPITOL ATTACKED. WURZELLE LIVES."

It sounded like he'd missed death by a hair. As a matter of fact, two of Wurzelle's officers were killed and three workers on the lower levels were injured. Wurzelle, busy in the Department of State twenty-seven corridors away, had missed his wings, if any.

Profuse were the warnings to make ready for further attacks.

Would Sally Barnes rocket back to America tomorrow with her father? I hoped this would change her plans. She'd be safe in Europe. Or would she —with Leon King there?

Further reports insisted that Wurzelle was perfectly confident of his ability to meet this crisis. He was sure he could wangle some help from abroad.

He would need a lot of it. As matters developed in the next few hours a lightning conquest was full upon us!

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At daybreak the second fury of bombs broke over the Glass Capitol.

Only eight bombs fell. They struck nothing. But we couldn't rejoice too much over that. They blasted eight holes on the eight corners of the city with such deadly accuracy that the stars in their courses might well take lessons.

"The pattern of destruction has begun with geometric precision," came the dire words of a calm announcer.

And later, "Twelve hours after the first bomb we still have no plan of defense.

"Several brave pilots organized a volunteer fleet and went forth, valiantly demonstrating the courage of our potential fighters. However, before they could come within range of those massive 'flying doughnuts' their instrument boards froze and they came down for perilous landings.

"Your announcer will ascend with the next party and try to give you a close-up of our enemy."

Late that afternoon the announcer went up.

He soared close enough to give a corroborating description of these seemingly human creatures: They were garbed in cloth and metal garments. Apparently nature had given them crests of checkered black and white scales over their heads and necks instead of hair. Their scarlet faces were alert and expressive; their scarlet arms and legs were muscular.

"There are females as well as males aboard. Most of them are watching through the transparent floors.

"I have counted sixty of these great flying doughnuts. Their circular hulls of coppery metal are a hundred yards in diameter that seemingly float along like clouds. The nature of their power and speed is a mystery."

The announcer's story broke off abruptly. It was completed a few hours later by his pilot who landed at the city port as white as a ghost. The invaders had overtaken his ship in a stratosphere chase. They had taken the announcer captive. The ship and pilot they had sent back to the ground unharmed.

This incident of mingled ruthlessness and mercy only intensified the capitol's paralysis of terror. *If the invaders wanted human captives, who would be next?*

## CHAPTER XXVI

### Saba's Big Promise

THE great secret society of SABA was quick to rally from the stun of the first attack—*to capitalize on it.*

Never had Gravelli Vetto sensed a surer bet than these wild fears of the people.

By autoplane he rained bright promises over the nation. Watch SABA! A plan of safety will be announced as soon as all SABA officials have met to receive a new store of personal power from their leader.

I wondered what Bobby would think of that. Would he attend this great meeting? Had he accepted an office, or was he simply an anonymous handy man who arranged the chairs for committee meetings?

The bells were ringing over the city on that momentous night. I was on a roof as wide as this city block and the leaden bell tones came from three directions to clash in my ears.

Lord Temp had brought me here, saying, "Your friend Bobby needs your help. He intends to finish what his father started."

So Bobby and I were at work up here in the darkness, emptying sacks of powder and mixing them with wooden paddles, distributing bucket loads of the stuff around over the roof. There was

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no light to guide or to reveal us—the blackout over the Glass Capitol was complete.

We counted our steps and deposited our potent mixture on nine piles to form a perfect octagon around a center.

"That's all for now," said Bobby. "Come this way. We can hear through the stairs that leads up from the stage."

We heard the impassioned speech of Gravelli Vetto, every word of it. The mighty ox was putting over a Mussolini-act that was a classic.

It lasted for two hours and was so full of backstabs that his own great SABA empire was figuratively bleeding to death before he got through.

"He's preparing them for violence," said Bobby. "They're already mad enough to murder the heads of government."

"He's after Wurzelle's scalp," came Lord Temp's low whisper, and with a careless snapping of bones he jogged halfway down on the stairs to sit with us. "They've split."

Mountebank that he was, this master of SABA aroused his fellow fakirs to a boiling point over the nation's dangers. Then he cracked the whip of their emotions:

"I can tell *you* everything because you're *all* with me. You're my fellow workers. *We're* the brains of this society. We make it go and it makes our living. We *see all*, we make our pay customers *believe all*. Are you as eager as I am to keep this game in our own hands?"

The shouts of, "Yes!" roared back at him from all sixteen-hundred of his clever henchmen. He followed through.

"You don't want to see the government grab it?"

"No!!!"

"Then listen to me. The *Honorable* Wurzelle has tried repeatedly to slice our profits in two." And the tirade that followed figuratively fried Wurzelle to a cinder.

IT was Wurzelle who had urged that fifty million people be lopped off. And how we needed those fifty million tonight!

"And you think they may return? No, they will not. I have learned that the mines have been filled with poison gas. Who did it? *Wurzelle!*"

The SABA-ites roared a violent protest.

"Temporary Death was to have been our great achievment," Vetto shouted. "This robber who tugs at our purse strings has *finished* Temporary Death for us. If he is allowed to live he will finish us. A man who will commit these treacherous mass murders must be taken care of."

The crowd had turned into a mob at white heat. Forgotten was any part Vetto might have had in helping fill the mines with gas.

Vetto added one more shovel of fuel to their fires: In the SABA predictions he'd recently found in Egypt it was foretold that not one but two leaders should be murdered when this future nation should install Temporary Death.

Lord Temp whispered to Bobby and me, "It's been ages since I've bumped into such a flagrant liar. But he's won his point."

You can probably guess what came next, and it's almost too dreadful to tell. This whole mad mob of charlatans clamored for action. Vetto waved them to silence. The action, he said, had already been taken and they would see the results at once.

The auditorium lights dimmed and the big screen on the wall came to life with a movie of Wurzelle's murder. It had happened that afternoon, but the news had been withheld for this official SABA blessing.

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The movie showed there had been a slight hitch in the execution of this deed. The masked men had arrived at the mines intending to toss their victim in with the poison gas behind the steel doors.

However, all the doors had been cut away as if by an electric torch—or more likely, electrical fingertips.

So instead, as the movie showed, they forced the Honorable Wurzelle into an autoplane tanker of poison gas and closed the lid over him.

AT the conclusion of the movie Gravelli Vetto announced that one more SABA prophecy had been fulfilled—the results of which would be displayed in one of the side rooms immediately after this night's meeting was adjourned—the body of Wurzelle.

The crowd cheered briefly and fell into a sullen murmuring. Their mob-spirit of a few minutes earlier had been somewhat chilled by the gruesome picture. They had been heated into sanctioning an assassination. Vetto had riveted the murder of Wurzelle to the heart of each of them; still they had been cheated of participation.

But the wily Vetto was ready for this shift in their moods:

"This act has cleared a path of wealth for each of you. We must strike while the iron is hot. Tomorrow new members will come to us by the millions. Need I remind you that new members mean increased riches?"

Vetto's plan was simple. The new promise of SABA was that *no member should ever suffer from bombs out of the sky.*

"But how can we guarantee this?" some SABA promoter asked.

"The people are stupid," Gravelli Vetto smiled contemptuously. "That is the law upon which our society prospers. *Tell* the people that no member will suffer bombs. *Collect your fees.* After that you have no further concern with any member's fate."

The riotous applause proved that sixteen hundred SABA charlatans were in the groove. They only regretted that the fifty million had not returned for this fleecing.

"Our promise, *'SABA shall suffer no bomb',* has just been released to the press. Before we leave this auditorium the world will be ready to swallow our guarantee."

Then it was that Bobbie Hammock nudged me and the three of us climbed up to the roof and touched a match to each of the piles of powder.

Lord Temp's chariot was right on the dot. He cracked the whip and Bobbie and I hung on tight.

From a safe mile to the west and a half mile up we could look back down on the city's only visible lights — an octagonal flower of purple flares.

Then the deadly accurate bombs dropped from some point high overhead and the big auditorium was blown to hell.

"SABA shall suffer no bombs," said Bobbie quietly.

Lord Temp gave a low laugh. "There was no time to suffer. SABA is dead."

## CHAPTER XXVII

### The Battle with King

I INQUIRED whether Lord Temp had cut the steel doors down and he admitted the act.

"In time?" I asked.

He shrugged. His only point had been to keep the way open for chance customers who decided to take advantage of what he had to offer.

As to the poison gas, he said the temporarily dead couldn't be bothered about that. Couldn't he empower them

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to eat their way through the Rocky Mountains with their teeth or ride the heavens on raindrops if he wanted to?

I took it to be a rhetorical question, certainly not one for me to answer . . .

The next day our radios announced that our government had dissolved and that we were completely at the mercy of the invaders.

The fleet moved down on the city slowly. Most of the several thousand passengers, male and female, had been transferred to one floating doughnut, which now came to a stop directly over the government plaza, fifty yards above the gathering crowds.

Deck covers opened to reveal seated rows of these scarlet visitors looking down on us like a stadium crowd.

Our captured radio announcer spoke for them. They had taken him prisoner for a purpose. All over the city his booming voice could be heard, amplified from each of the sixty ships that now hovered over us like stationary clouds.

"I am speaking for these ships," he said over and over. "The words I say are the words these visitors are putting in my mouth . . .

" . . . *Do not be afraid. Come to the plaza, everyone, and listen.*"

The city's terrified population thronged the open spaces among the Goldfish Bowls.

"We have not come to destroy you—only those who carried destruction in their hearts," the announcer seemed to be reading.

"We are peace loving people. In our country we work together in harmony. Our scarlet faces are forged in fire like the bright metal that gives us power. The squares of luminous white that checker our scaled hoods light our paths as we walk through our cavernous land.

"Now that we have shown you our power, remember this promise: We shall not return to molest you as long as you are ruled by men of good will.

"Have you a leader of good will who will respond to our pledge of peace?"

INSTANTLY our multitude clamored for Prescott Barnes. He was ushered forward from our ranks. I fought my way closer to the ruins of the Wurzelle Bowl for a better view. Coppery light from the ships' hulls was reflected in the tens of thousands of faces that turned toward Prescott Barnes.

Someone followed him with a microphone, others escorted him up the stairs that spiralled the nearest Bowl. When he came into view on the summit our cheers gave him a magnificent reception. This dramatic event was being relayed to the whole disillusioned nation. It was a moment for taking heart.

"I believe," said Barnes, "that I am speaking for the American people. Soon they will elect new leaders. Until then, I shall represent them."

In a brief speech he declared he would take these strangers at their word, adding that he saw a weird and uncanny intelligence in their choice of bomb targets; and he believed America would perceive what he perceived: that this attack, ironically enough, might prove an act of friendship. Time would tell.

Now one further request came from the scarlet invaders' spokesman. Was there anywhere among us a king for them?

*Among us a king for them?*

Barnes frowned, fearing the invitation was aimed at him.

Then came Lord Temp in his chariot of death, racing like a low-flying autoplane over the heads of the multitude.

The mystified crowd gaped, and there were excited screams from many who looked up to see horses' hoofs pounding the air directly above them.

Lord Temp leaped from the chariot

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to catch the long chain ladder that hung from the deck of the central ship. His horses raced on and the chariot swung out of sight among the city's towers.

Such grace and elegance in a red-robed skeleton you'd never think to see. By Lord Temp's very attitude, his skull tilted upward, his free arm lifting in a questioning appeal, his feet starting to ascend the ladder, he was obviously asking if he was the king they sought.

"You are the king we have awaited," the spokesman's voice boomed. And while we looked on in mystified silence our thousands of scarlet visitors cheered, beating their hands together to send down a skyful of thunder.

Without a spoken word Lord Temp acknowledged his appointment with many a deep bow.

Just then a harsh voice blurted through the plaza amplifiers, and the crowds turned to see where this interruption came from. I saw. *It came from Leon King.*

He was perched within fifteen feet of me, on the pinnacle of Wurzelle's Goldfish Bowl ruins—a blackened sagging segment of metal stairway upthrust from the side of the bomb pit.

Leon King had a microphone in one hand, an amber-handled ray gun in the other. He was seeing no one but Lord Temp, and he sounded like a raving maniac.

"You did it! You killed my father! You're an evil spirit, that's what you are! I'm going to kill you!"

I CAN never prove that Lord Temp's yellow visage paled as the ray gun leveled. All I know is, I surged forward like a chariot horse and plunged for Leon King. Yes, Leon, the incognito son of Wurzelle who had played Prescott Barnes for a sucker all these months.

I sprang at him, and the ruined stairway went crashing down with us, and a huddle of spectators on a lower shelf of ruins screamed and jumped out of our way. That ray gun, spraying death, cut a line close over my head and as I ducked it caught the heel of my shoe and there was a flash of burning sensations like an emery wheel against my foot.

Into the ruins we tumbled. I was punching and kicking, not to mention biting a wrist with all the savagery of my cavemen ancestors. The ray gun dropped, fell through a crevice to a lower floor.

That freed my feet and let me shout, and believe me, brother, I was shouting as fast as I was walloping.

"I should have known you the night you thumped me over the head, you—(Biff, biff!) You kept guard while your father stole from Barnes. This is for that! (Smack!) And this for threatening skeletons you don't know anything about. (Crack!) And this for forcing your company on a swell girl like Sally." (Pop-pop-pop! Thud!)

"Punch him, Jim! Punch him for me!"

By gollies, that voice was Sally, nobody else! She was squealing with delight, climbing down a broken shelf of ruins. She'd been taking in the whole performance from a box seat above us.

I didn't need to punch Leon King any more. That old "chimp cage" was still in working condition, and he was in no mood to resist. It locked on him automatically. (The courts and I would see him later.)

I looked up to see the great doughnut ships were forming into a line, gliding off like a parade of balloons.

Sally clutched my arm. "Quick. My autoplane. Let's follow."

We shot up from the lower trafficway in time to shoot in ahead of a few thou-

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sand other parade chasers. The procession circled the city and started off toward the mountains.

Lord Temp was charioting along beneath the last ship, driving with dignity befitting a king, and his scarlet-faced subjects were still cheering him.

There was a bit of traffic on the chain ladder. Someone looking very much like Bobbie Hammock had just ascended. Now the announcer was closer, thinking to help him off—and in doing so we almost caught up with the chariot. Lord Temp, glancing back, saw me.

Chills struck through me. Lord Temp was giving me that come-hither beckon.

I looked the ther way. Then I looked back. Persistent cuss. He was pointing at the empty space in his chariot and motioning me to come.

Sally hadn't seen. She had just successfully landed the announcer from the end of the ladder, no small feat now that we were picking up both speed and elevation.

THE announcer was busting to talk, and the daughter of Prescott Barnes was willing to listen.

Yes, it was Sally's brother who had just now gone up there.

"There was some scarlet-faced girl motioning to him," the announcer said, "and she was a beauty, too. If she'd been our kind of person I'll bet my life she'd be a knock-'em-dead blonde.

"And something else funny," he went on. "When they had me put out that call for a king, one big fellow up there wanted the job so bad he was ready to fight. But what did his cronies do but start a card game. Right away he was in it and his face froze with one eyebrow up and the other down and he was lost to the world."

"What puzzles me," said Sally, "is how on earth you could understand their language. Who interpreted?"

"Between us, Miss Barnes, that's to be a secret. I didn't have to translate a thing. Their language is ours, slang and all. They've never seen Mars or Venus, if you ask me. They know America, and they had something to tell her in no uncertain terms . . .

"Don't ask me how they worked all their tricks. They managed always to be high in the sky at daylight so no one knew where they came from. But you'll remember some ranger reported he thought they had a base in the Rockies. I suspect their bases go deep. Just one man's opinion, of course. Here's my stop. . . . Goodbye."

Sally and I were alone, not quite. That grinning skeleton was still flying along in his chariot right beside us. His subjects were waving at him to come on, and the ships were picking up speed, bound for the high clouds.

Once more Lord Temp beckoned to me. Sally saw.

And she saw that I knew enough to accept a ride where I *was* wanted, and hadn't forgotten that riding with her was strictly taboo.

So I started to cross over.

Sally's hand grabbed me by the belt just as I meant to leap. I caught the autoplane door and hovered in midair and contemplated the ground a mile below.

As if to help me to make up my mind a bell sounded from a distance. I started to cross again.

"Come back here, Jim Flinders." Sally had me by the arm and she meant it. "I'm not going to make the mistake my great-great-great-great-grandmother made. *Jim! Don't you love me?*"

Love her? I'd leaped through a century and a half just to love her. I bounced back into the seat and grabbed her and squeezed her for dear life,

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scared to death, I don't mind saying, for fear some superior power was going to pull me away and whisk me off into the sky.

But when I turned my head for another glance, the chariot was racing off toward the clouds in the wake of the fleet. The grotesque old skeleton looked back, grinning, and I knew he was winking at me out of his hollow eyes.

THE END

## ★ TANGLED LIVES ★

HAVE you ever stopped to think how complicated the arrangement of the life about us really is. Our physical environment is none too good to the plants and animals. It forces the living organisms to adopt elaborate mechanisms, so that they may keep their particular race from becoming extinct. The result of all this is a struggle for survival.

Due to this struggle, many interesting plant and animal relationships are brought out. We shall consider some of the most interesting of these relationships. Let us start with a parasitism—a condition where one animal or plant lives at the expense of another animal.

Madame ichneumon-fly is quite clever. She wants her young ones to have the best chance of survival, and therefore establishes a parasitic relationship with the caterpillar—of course at the caterpillar's expense. Madame ichneumon-fly has really developed a beautiful scheme. She lays her eggs directly into the very inner portion of a caterpillar's body by means of a long sharp egg depositor. When these eggs develop into larvae, which are noted for their notorious appetites—the larvae are now in a strategic position to obtain free meals and shelter. The larvae—protected by the body wall of the caterpillar from the tough external conditions—begin to eat the inner portions of the caterpillar body. The ichneumon-fly larvae do not eat the vital organs of the caterpillar at once; that would only kill a good meal ticket before full advantage had been taken of it. So the larvae eat only the fat and connective tissue and leave the vital organs be. What the ichneumon-fly larvae really wants is a good comfortable house to develop in. The larvae are too lazy to build a protective covering of their own, so they let the caterpillar live until he develops his pupa and then consume his vital organs. The caterpillar dies and leaves the larvae a durable home in which to develop to adulthood.

The liver fluke has an elaborate life cycle; constantly changing his form and his host—he is a desperate character in every sense of the word. Once a liver-fluke finds his way into the bile duct of a sheep, he immediately starts busying himself with the task of increasing his species of animal. So he lays a multitude of eggs in the bile duct of the sheep and sits back comfortably to await developments. His eggs are washed into the intestine of the sheep by the juices secreted from the bile duct. With the waste material of the intestine, the eggs are next passed out of the body of the sheep. The egg now lays upon the wet ground just waiting for a good rain. In the event of a rain, the eggs hatch and a tiny swimming larva is formed. This larva swims about in the rain just waiting for a certain snail into whose body nature has instructed it to bore. Not any snail will do; it must be a special type of snail—of the genus Symnea if we must be exact. Once inside the snail's body, these swimming larvae increase their numbers and gradually develop into a more efficient form. Soon the larvae, now shaped like a tadpole, bore their way from within the snail and reach the outside. Once outside, this tadpole-like larva loses its tail and curls itself into the shape of a ball. It develops a hard covering over it, so that it can lay about in the pasture without suffering the climatic hardships. In this small sphere-shaped form the liver fluke lies in wait for some unsuspecting sheep to eat it along with the grass. When eaten by a sheep, the juices in the sheep's digestive system will dissolve off the tough covering of the sphere and release the parasitic liver fluke into the bile duct. With the liver fluke in the sheep's duct, the sheep must play the part of a good host. He must forever continue to give the liver fluke valuable and nutritious juices, which the sheep himself could use. He must provide the fluke with a comfortable home inside the liver. The irony of it all is that this infested sheep furnishes his digestive tract as a means of transporting the fluke's eggs to the ground; in other words, the sheep helps the fluke produce one of its miserable kind which may in turn affect more of the sheep's own species.

Plants may parasitize other plants as in the case of wheat rusts and plant molds. Plants may parasitize animals, as is the case when those microscopic bacteria and fungi attack and wither animal bodies. An interesting example of animals parasitizing plants has occurred when one finds a gall growing to a plant.

These gall producing insects lay their eggs on any portion of a plant; the plant in turn grows tissue about this developing egg, and the result is a round sac-like structure called a gall.

Up to now we have talked only of the harmful relationships that exist between the representatives of the living on this earth. But we must not harbor the impression that all living things constantly exploit one another. We can find many cases of plants and animals living together in such

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a manner as to derive the maximum advantage for the survival of each of the parties involved.

One of the interesting examples of this living together for mutual benefits, called symbiosis, can be found in the termites. The termite as you no doubt know lives on a diet of wood: eating trees, furniture, books and paper. However, the termite by itself cannot break down the cellulose or the wood into digestible substance. But with the aid of certain microscopic flagellates—who are capable of breaking down cellulose and wood, thru the action of enzymes, into digestible material—the termite finds it possible to exist on his diet of wood. What has each organism gained? The microscopic flagellate is given the protection of the termite's body which shields it from rain, wind, sleet, and so forth. The flagellate could never have ripped the wood from its source—having no powerful jaws with which to do so. In return for the above, the termite is given a means of digesting and assimilating what would otherwise be uneatable. Just expose the termite to high pressured oxygen so that the flagellate dies and the termite lives; why, the termite will be utterly helpless without his little protozoan friend. He will eat wood, and while so doing, die because of extreme starvation.

The hermit-crab is a good food getter, however, he feels that he could use a good bodyguard for both offensive and defensive purposes. So the hermit-crab places an imaginary want-ad on the sandy beach, which runs as follows: "I am an excellent food getter, but would consider giving up a few crumbs for an animal that could offer me a sphere of protection. If the body-guard cannot move himself about freely, then I will arrange to give him free transportation—carrying him in my claws."

Who applies for this position? None other than the lovely pink sea-anemone (to be exact of the genus Adamsia). The anemone fills the requirements to perfection. Possessing a body which is completely covered with batteries of poisonous stinging-cells, the anemone is a good fighter to have around when trouble arises. Some crabs carry their anemones about in their claws as thugs would carry their "brass-knuckles."

Not all partnerships are as smooth running as these examples. Generally, partnerships, are brought together blindly by the power of chemical and physical stimulus. Almost all of the animals (perhaps with the exception of man) enter into these mutual assistance relationships without a rational idea of what is involved. The result? Just disrupt the mechanisms of a relationship, and the most harmonious example of symbiosis may turn into the most horrible example of parasitism.

For instance, let us take a look at a perfect relationship that exists between a form of Scotch heather and a fungus. The heather possesses the chlorophyll, and hence is capable of combining the carbon dioxide present in the air with the water it absorbs through its roots, and by a process known as photosynthesis—synthesizes these various components into a form of sugar needed for energy by all the living forms. So the heather supplies the sugar. However, the fungus is not without its own talents; it has the power to transform the inert nitrogen of the atmosphere into a form where it can be utilized to form more of that precious protoplasm. This is all very fine; however, just increase the concentration of nitrogen salts in the soil where this fungus infested heather is growing and a royal battle begins. The fungus begins to prosper; soon it begins to grow without a limit, and when it becomes powerful enough to do so—it forgets the brotherly love it held for the heather, under the ordinary conditions, and ends up by completely destroying the heather.

This is really not so strange when you consider that such a reverse to parasitism may even occur in such a perfectly harmonious machine as the human body. Is there not a patholgical condition in the human where the white cells of the body may turn from their duties of encircling the foreign substances in the blood stream, and begin engulfing the valuable red blood corpuscles? What about cancer itself? This most certainly does not suggest the condition of balance existing among the various factions of the human body.

Let me close this discussion of mixed parasitism and symbiosis by describing an interesting conditon that exists in a little flatworm—called Convoluta roscoffensis. The Convoluta develops from an egg which has not as yet become infested with its partner in symbiosis—namely, the green algae. However, as the egg develops, it gives off nitrogenous maste material that attracts the algae about it. Algae are small green plant cells, capable of manufacturing their own food. The algae surround the developing egg and soon the egg develops into a larva. The larva then engulfs some of its surrounding algae, but does not kill them. The algae stay lodged in the Convoluta and increase their numbers—prospering in the favorable environment they have found themselves.

Up till now, while he was still growing, the larva acquired his food by mouth and paid little attention to the growing green garden that he was harboring within his body. Upon reaching his adult form, the Convoluta no longer can use his mouth as a means of acquiring his food. He simply begins to live off the excess of his internal garden. However, after the worm has grown old, he suddenly becomes greedy and eats his entire garden of green algae. After his meal is over and he once more feels the pangs of hunger, he finds that he can no longer use his mouth as a means of getting food, and that he no longer has a garden of green algae left upon which to feed. So the Convoluta starves to death, a victim of his own appetite.

READ MAMMOTH DETECTIVE TOO

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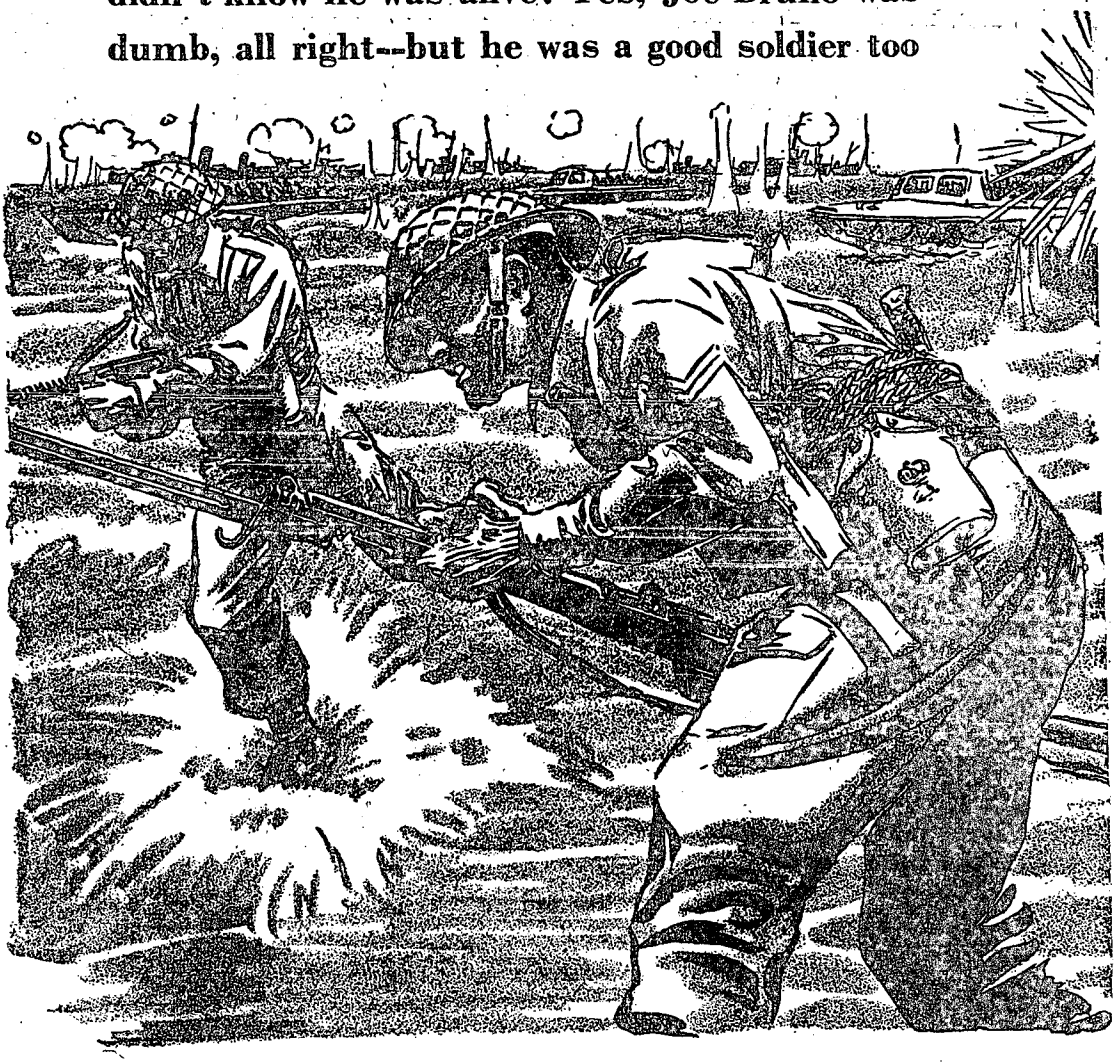
# PHANTOM COMMANDO

By LEROY YERXA

**His mates said Joe Bruno was so dumb he didn't know he was alive! Yes, Joe Bruno was dumb, all right--but he was a good soldier too**



FOR fifteen minutes we crouched in the bottom of the flat bottomed landing barge. Half a hundred Commandos, ready to attack the French coast for the first time. Fred Howard leaned forward and touched my shoulder. I twisted around as though a Nazi had landed on my back.

Howard waggled his finger at me and shook his head from side to side.



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Joe Bruno was one of the first to pile off the invasion barge

"Easy there," he whispered. "It ain't so bad. All kinds of action in a few minutes."

I looked back along the rows of silent men behind us. They all carried full packs, rifles ready, daggers in their belts. This was no game.

The top-kick stood near the front of the barge. He was staring through the pea-soup fog, toward the beach. I



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thought I could hear a couple of Jerries talking somewhere out front.

The dryness in my throat wasn't fear. Perspiration collected on my face and the palms of my hands. The top-kick turned and motioned for us to stand up. I looked at Fred Howard and he jerked his thumb toward Joe Bruno on the opposite side of the barge.

We both knew Bruno. Howard and I had watched the heavy-set, black-eyed Pole train during the past months. True, he was dumb, but Bruno had a savage devotion for his country. He had waited a long time for this chance to muss up the Nazis. Now his dark face wore a ferocious scowl. We often said of him that if he were killed he'd be too dumb to realize it. We were only kidding, of course.

The barge grated on the sand and stopped with a jolt. I caught my balance and went over the side into the shallow water. Joe Bruno cleared the opposite side at the same time and we went up the beath together.

I heard the top-kick urging the rest of the men to hurry.

*"Righto—Over you go now."*

We all had a perfect picture of the town in our minds. We'd studied maps and reconnaissance photos for a week. Bruno was ahead of me, bent double, rifle pointed ahead of him.

A shout went up about fifty yards down the beach. The Nazis had spotted us. Bruno must have seen something in the fog ahead of us. He whipped a grenade from his belt and jerked the pin out with his teeth. I saw him grin as he threw it into the tangle of barbed wire that stretched away in both directions. It hit and exploded and I heard a scream of pain as a gun pit blew up with a roar. Machine guns started to clatter and hell blew wide open. I threw myself flat on my belly and wiggled forward. Not Bruno. He kept on running, breaking a trail through the wire with grenades. A hole opened up and my bunch went through it.

The men on our barge had orders to capture a large canning warehouse close to the water front. There were machine gun nests on the water side. The warehouse was built up on logs so that the front was even with the street. There were two sentries at the entrance. Joe Bruno took care of them with his dagger. He did it silently and before we had a chance to help. Fred Howard and I went through the door and I saw a Nazi coming at me with his bayonet. I ducked and sliced under his chin with ten inches of steel. It ripped his face wide open.

The men were already beyond me before I could get my blade out of him. There must have been another Nazi in the corner, near the front of the warehouse. I saw two streaks of orange flame cut the darkness and felt my leg jerk from under me. I went down, swearing bloody murder. Joe Bruno turned around in time to see me get it. He sighted carefully and pulled the trigger. The Nazi that got me toppled over like a ten-pin.

I tried to stand up, saw that one machine gun was still in action and that they were turning it on Joe. I couldn't get up. The Nazi gun turned around and opened up on our men. Joe Bruno pitched his grenade carefully. It exploded and condensed hell blotted out the last Nazi gun. Bruno took a dozen slugs in the belly just before the grenade went off. He went down heavily.

I had managed to crawl to the door. There was a narrow ditch that led down under the warehouse. I dropped into the ditch. My leg hurt pretty bad. I saw the street, bathed in gunfire, suddenly whirl around and turn black.

WHEN I came around everything was quiet. The fog was still thick

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and I thought once I heard a whistle sound on the beach. I tried to check the time, but my watch crystal was crushed and the hands stuck. I crawled painfully along the ditch and dropped to the sand under the warehouse. I knew the barges were gone and that they hadn't seen me in the ditch. My leg felt as though it was gone from the hip down. There was a curious numbness that did not hurt, but it made me curse at my own uselessness.

There was a pile of old fishing nets in one corner of the place. I dragged myself under them and hid as best I could. The raid must have been successful. I knew the canning warehouse was out of commission for a while. I could hear the Nazis rushing around up on the street. Now that our boys were gone, the Germans were brave as the devil. A lot of officers were shouting orders.

They searched the cannery above me, and then went away. I tried to bandage my knee, but gave it up as a bad job. If I held it out straight on the sand, it didn't hurt so much. I hoped they wouldn't decide to stick their bayonets into the pile of nets under which I had hidden.

After a while it was quieter and I fell asleep. It was daylight when I awakened and hotter than hell. The nets smelled of old fish and my knee had swollen up the size of a ham. I sat there all day, once in a while sneaking a look at the Germans who were cleaning up the beach. They had a lot of dead to carry away. "I'm in an awful mess," I kept thinking. "They won't be back for a week. I can't move with this leg. Sooner or later I'll have to give up."

Every time I tried to move the leg, I had to grit my teeth and hold back a howl of pain.

Toward night I must have gone a little nutty. The fog rolled in from the channel. It must have been close to nine. Nine had been the zero hour last night.

The town was silent. I guess they were plenty worried about another raid. I felt sick, and my fever went up like a balloon. The cool air helped some and I managed to get some comfort out of listening to our bomber squadrons roar over and away toward Berlin.

I slept perhaps for five minutes. When I awakened, a shadowy figure was running toward me from the beach. I heard a Nazi challenge him. Could it be another raid? The Nazi started firing and the soldier ducked under the end of the warehouse and came straight toward me.

I knew him now. He was close to the nets. It was Joe Bruno.

"Where you hide?" His voice was low.

BRUNO must have been left behind. He knew I was here and had waited for darkness.

"Here," I threw the nets away from me and tried to stand up. He was on his knees, lifting me into his arms. Blood dripped from Bruno's shoulder.

"You hurt bad?" he asked in a hushed voice. "Hold tight to my neck."

Cursing my own weakness I held on and he started running toward the pier that jutted into the channel at the end of the warehouse. A Nazi patrol came out of the darkness. There were three of them. They started firing at us. I guess I must have stared up at that Pole's face like an admiring school kid. I know that's the way I felt. He paid no attention to them. Just kept on running toward the water.

There was an old fishing dory tied to the pier. He put me in the bottom of it, slashed the rope with his dagger and shoved off. The wind swept us away from the end of the pier and into the

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channel. The fog closed down tightly around us.

He leaned over me, a curious, questioning look in his eyes.

"The others," he asked. "Have they gone far?"

"Far?" I didn't understand. "They left last night. It's all over. You must have been asleep."

He grinned.

"I didn't sleep," he assured me. "I killed and killed. I must have fallen behind."

I was getting a little anxious. We might be picked up yet if we didn't get farther away from shore.

"Joe," I said. "We better start rowing."

"I—I don't understand." His broad face darkened. He seemed greatly puzzled. "The fight. It is not finished."

I remembered the bullets he had taken in the stomach. The man must be out of his head.

"Joe," I choked, "Joe, you crazy fool, the battle was last night. The raid is done, finished."

He wasn't listening.

"The raid is never over," he said quietly. "You stay here. They must be ahead of me. I have to catch up."

I grabbed his arm. I was sobbing like a kid.

"We gotta get back across the channel," I said.

He jerked away from me and turned toward the French coast. I didn't try to stop him then. His back was ripped open with slugs and the bones and bloody flesh stuck out like a raw steak. He plopped into the water feet first and started to swim back. He held his rifle carefully above his head and disappeared into the fog.

I GUESS I fainted then. I remember the kindly face of the old Dover fisherman who picked me up in the shadows of the white cliffs.

"You are English?" he asked.

I nodded and the whiskered, wrinkled old face smiled at me. I could smell the salty, fishy odor of his oilskins.

"Thank your God, soldier," he said. "You're home in England."

They took me to a hospital at Southampton and in a week the leg was in pretty good shape. At least it was from the knee up. They had to take the rest of it off.

I kept thinking of Joe Bruno and wondering what happened to him. Saturday afternoon, Fred Howard came up to see me. He said it was hard to believe that I had got back alive and he felt pretty bad about the leg. I told him about how Joe Bruno saved me.

"And Joe was in worse shape than I am," I finished. "I don't think he ever got back to shore that night. He was all shot up and crazy as a loon . . . " I stopped speaking when I saw the look in Fred Howard's eyes.

"Ain't you made a mistake?" said Fred. "You sure you wasn't out of your head? It *musta* been somebody else rescued you. I saw Bruno get it myself. Man, *he* never could have lived a minute after that wad of slugs hit him!"

I looked at him.

"No," I shook my head. "I didn't make a mistake. I saw how he was shot up too. I'd swear a man couldn't live that way—but you know how we used to kid about how dumb he was—wouldn't know he was dead . . . Well, I guess he was tough enough to *almost* make that the truth! He must have lived a whole day in that condition . . ."

There was a strange look in Fred Howard's eyes.

"A whole day . . . "

"What are you trying to get at," I said, a funny feeling in the pit of my stomach.

Fred swallowed.

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"Every night," he said, "at nine—zero hour that night, you remember—the Jerrys bust wide open with their beach-head defense. You'd think a thousand men had attacked them. Buildings have been blown up. Our planes report plenty of damage . . . "

"Look, Fred," I said suddenly, "don't go off on no crazy imaginings like that. Joe Bruno might have lived one day like he was—but not . . . " I stopped.

"No," said Fred Howard. "He couldn't. It must be the underground . . . got excited when we attacked, and are just keeping up the good work. Those Frenchmen have plenty of guts . . . " He rose to his feet. "I gotta be going," he said, looking at his watch. Plenty work to do . . . "

I said goodbye and watched him go.

Underground? Yeah, that must be it. But funny how I keep remembering that crack we used to make about Joe Bruno . . .

Too dumb to *know* he's dead . . .

Nuts! I'm letting it get me too! it *must* be the underground. Sure! Because if you'd seen those bones sticking out of his back . . . you'd *know*.

Too dumb . . .

## ★ ALCHEMY ★

IN THE medieval times, or what we now call the Middle Ages, there arose a group of men who were searching for a magic substance which would transform the more base metals, such as lead, iron and copper into the nobler metals such as silver and gold. It would appear that the seers of Egypt started the search and made the first claims of success. They also were on the trail of the alkahest, the substance which would dissolve all other solvents, as well as any substance which could be found. Another one of their desires was to get the panacea or the cure-all. They fervently and religiously believed that all these substances and formulas were to be found and that magic and incantation as well as proper pay to the proper idols or persons or untold deities would bring the maximum of success.

Many tried to accomplish these goals; some claimed that they had and by virtue of this claim were held to be wise men of their localities. Such a person was Merlin, the intellectual giant of King Arthur's court; but aside from literary characters, many men actually claimed such ability. Even as late as the sixteenth century, Ponce de Leon, a wise and well known explorer, came to these American shores in search of the elixir of life, or a fountain of youth.

Needless to say, these people were always disappointed, for no such substances or formulas as they sought were to be found. Paul Ehrlich, famed for his work on the cure of syphillis, also searched for a kind of panacea, but even such a biochemist as he was disappointed, even though mankind was grateful for what he had done.

The modern chemist and physicist has done more in ten years with careful research and an intense desire to get at the truth than all the alchemists had done in many hundreds of years. We have all heard of the cyclotron, and some of us have even seen one. The cyclotron is a device, and a huge one, for speeding up small particles of matter to terrific speeds.

These small particles (their diameters are millions of times smaller than the thinnest hair one can find) are then run smack into a mass of other material. The result is amazing, for many changes have been made and the mass after being rammed by many of these particles may even change its chemical nature. Now this is no pipe-dream. Many of our most distinguished and most brilliant men are doing this work and bringing forth results which the alchemists of yore would have been amazed to see.

Since it is very difficult to find radio-active substances such as radium, and since they are of great use in attacking cancer, it is indeed pleasing to know that the chemists and physicists have been able to make a radioactive sodium. This is undoubtedly going to be of great use and perhaps mean much to the victims of cancer. Some of the great results of the application of the scientific technique have been the changing of nitrogen to boron and helium, as well as the changing of this same substance into carbon and helium. Fluorine likewise has been attacked by the same procedure and has been changed into oxygen and other substances. For a long time, substances which could not be changed to other substances were called elements. The amazing thing is that these so-called elements are now broken down and changed into other elements, but not by ordinary chemical methods. The whole field promises much for the future and may be the source of hope and joy for many a pessimist on the matter of the future of the earth with respect to synthetics. It presents an important interesting problem, one to be long considered.

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# YOU CAN'T KID

## BY ROBERT BLOCH

WHY do I go to Jack's Shack to eat?

The food is nothing to brag about. I suppose my ulcers are getting used to it. And the meals have improved a little lately—since they began to serve bicarbonate of soda as a regular dessert.

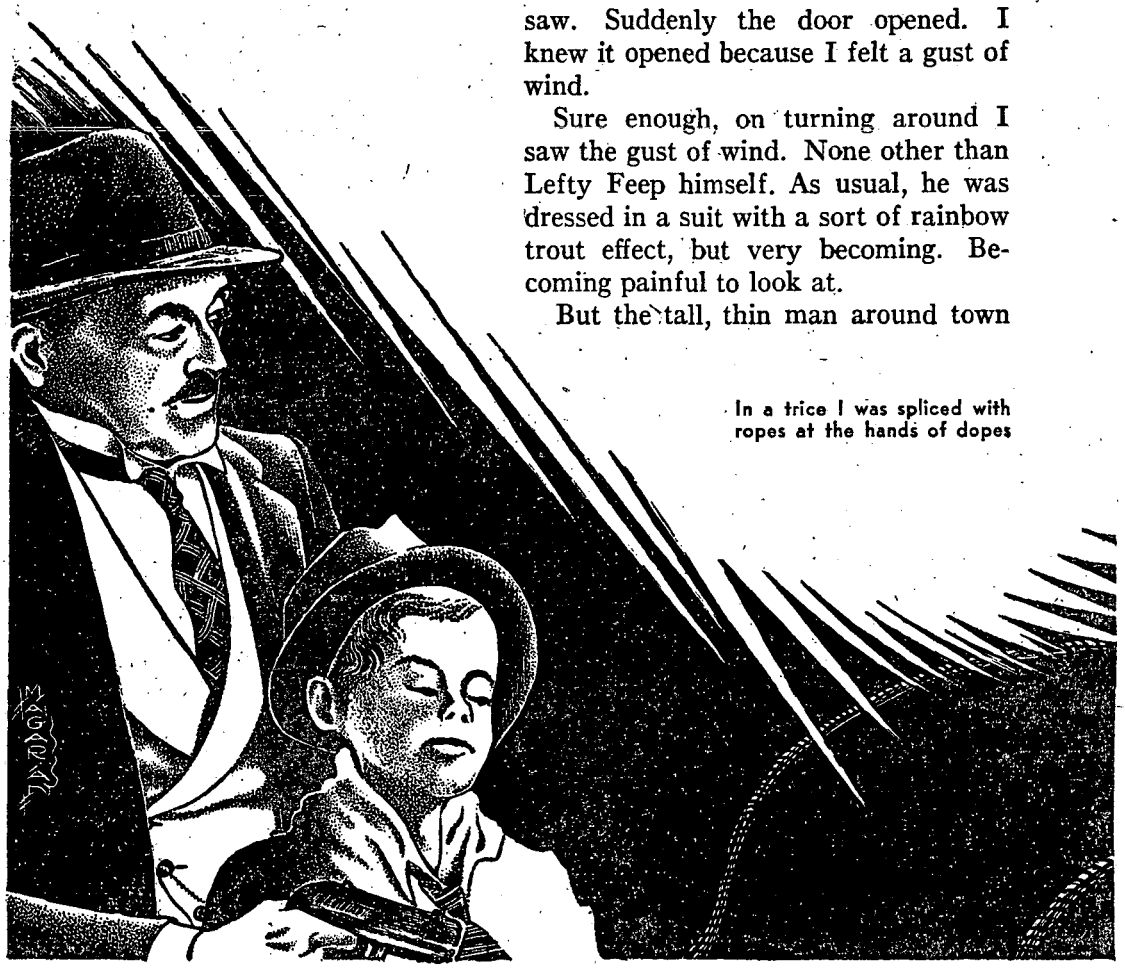
Still, I take an awful risk when I eat there. Because I never know when I'm liable to run into my friend Lefty Feep. Jack may dish out terrible food, but Lefty Feep dishes out worse stories. And the food isn't as hard on my stomach as those stories are on my credulity. I usually get a bad case of mental indigestion.

For example—

I was sitting in Jack's Shack just the other night, doing my best to cut into one of his steaks without an electric saw. Suddenly the door opened. I knew it opened because I felt a gust of wind.

Sure enough, on turning around I saw the gust of wind. None other than Lefty Feep himself. As usual, he was dressed in a suit with a sort of rainbow trout effect, but very becoming. Becoming painful to look at.

But the tall, thin man around town



In a trice I was spliced with ropes at the hands of dopes



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# LEFTY FEEP

**What incredible thing had happened here in this home for aged gangsters? Somehow they had a new lease on life!**

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who travels in the most vicious circles was more than a sight for sore eyes. He looked youthful, radiant, positively boyish.

I told him so as he sat down next to me.

"You're looking great, Lefty," I said. "Very fresh and young."

Feep moved his chair back a foot and frowned.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Here I haven't seen you in a month and I tell you how youthful you look. Why get peeved?"

Lefty Feep sighed.

"It is truthful I am youthful," he said. "But I do not wish to be kidded about being a kid."

He sat there sulking.

"For heaven's sake!" I protested. "There's no need to act like a baby about it."

Feep jumped to his feet with a screech. "Don't say that way!" he howled. "I got to squawk about that baby talk. I recently have an experience with a nursery that drives me nerts."

I rose to escape, for I smelled a story coming on. But Feep detained me, with a firm grasp on the collar.

"Nerts, I tell you!" he repeated. "In fact, I will tell you, and drive you nerts along with me."

"Travel alone," I suggested. "Nerts to you, all right. But as for me, I must be going."

Feep nodded. "That is right," he agreed. "You are going to listen to me."

He pulled me down in my chair again.

"But I have an appointment," I protested.

"Make it a disappointment," said Lefty Feep. "Me; I got a declaration in preparation about the younger generation."

Turning his strangely boyish face to me with an earnest stare, Lefty Feep opened his mouth and presented a slice of tongue in a conversational sandwich. The crumbs of wisdom fell.

Said Feep—

I AM personally a very active fellow and about a month ago I get extremely tired of just loafing.

Naturally this harms and alarms me, so I decide to go up and see my favorite cemetery-filler, a Doc by the name of Subconscious Sigmund. Subconscious Sigmund is a psychologist who knows all about nerves and has plenty of his own, but I figure he is just the man to explain the pain in my brain.

Subconscious Sigmund gives me the old hello and what do you know, and I explain to him how tired I get from loafing.

"Tired of loafing, eh?" says Sigmund. "Well, then, what you need is a vacation."

"Vacation?" I say. "But I am not doing anything *now*."

"Then why do you get tired?" he comes back. "Obviously if you aren't doing anything and you still get tired, there is something wrong. The trouble must be that you can't relax. So in order to relax, you must take a vacation."

This makes sense to me.

"Also," says Sigmund, "it is a good idea if you cultivate a hobby Have you got a hobby?"

I can answer this one, and I do. "Definitely," I tell him. "Some guys play piano and some guys play violins. But me—I play ponies."

"A horse-player, eh?" Sigmund barks.

"Yes," I admit. "And there isn't any sweeter music than the sound of a horse coming in first."

"Then why not go to a race-track for your vacation?" asks Sigmund.

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"An excellent idea. And I know just where to go now. I am off to Florida."

Sigmund shakes his head.

"You will not get much of a vacation down there," he tells me. "The army takes over all the hotels and you will have no place to stay."

"You are wrong," I come back. "I will not even try to stay at a hotel. I will stay with Happy Pappy."

"What in the name of the Id, the Ego, and the Psychic Trauma, is Happy Pappy?" asks Sigmund.

So I explain.

"I take it you never hear of the Crook of the Month Club. It is a very exclusive group of goniffs, yeggs, and heisters from way back in the 1920's and whenever. All of the old-time hoods and molls belong to this organization, which is nothing more or less than a protective association for gangsters.

"In these days they are making a lot of the old mahoola and being careless, nobody socks it away for a rainy day. So Happy Pappy organizes the Crook of the Month Club. Every month these various personalities in the rackets put away a certain amount of lettuce to nibble at in the future when their teeth get dull.

"NOW, twenty years later, most of them are very much retired. Some are retired in various graveyards, and others are retired at Federal hotels. But there are a good dozen of old-time loud noises in the rackets who are still around.

"So Happy Pappy takes the dough they save all these years and buys a boarding house down in Florida. A sort of an Old Crook's Home. They all live there very quietly with their scrapbooks and press clippings and brag about their police records.

"I know there is always an extra room or two, and so I will stay there in Florida with Happy Pappy."

Subconscious Sigmund lifts his hands.

"You still do not tell me who Happy Pappy is," he reminds me.

I oblige. "Happy Pappy," I tell him, "is the oldest pickpocket in the world. He gets his start hoisting purses in the crowd that listens to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. He cleans up big in the World's Fair of 1893. He is so old he finally goes around in a wheel chair as part of a charity outfit that raises funds. But he still raises most of his funds from other people's pockets.

"Anyhow he finally opens this boarding house for what is left of the Crook of the Month Club. I know he will be very glad to see me and will treat me very nicely. Particularly if I sew up my pockets first."

Subconscious Sigmund shakes his head. "I hope you have a pleasant vacation," he says. "Be sure to take things easy."

"I always take everything easy," I assure him. "Though not as easy as Happy Pappy takes things. He is a marvel."

With these parting syllables I am out the door and on my way to the train. The next morning I am on the floor in Florida.

I am so excited and happy about being here that I do not even check in to the Old Crook's Home, but head right for the tracks to play the ponies. I spend the afternoon listening to a lot of pretty notes—bank notes—and it is almost dark before I grab a cab and drive down to the Old Crook's Home in Miami.

I am feeling so good about my winnings that I do not notice the way the cabby shudders when he pulls up in front of a dark, dingy old barn on a side street.

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I march up the rickety steps and ring the bell.

Nothing happens.

I ring again.

All at once a little slot opens in the front of the door and a nose sticks out. A big, red nose, with warts on it.

"What's the password," says the Nose.

"Password?" I say, confused.

"Nobody gets in without a password, buddy," says the Nose.

Sure enough, this joint is rigged up like an old-time speakeasy. Evidently these old mobsters don't realize we are living in a new day and age.

So I decide to humor the Nose.

"Joe sends me," I tell him.

"O.K., then," the Nose grumbles, and opens the door.

I STEP into the hallway. Two arms grab me from behind. In front of me there is an old ginch waving a blackjack.

"Frisk him, boys," cackles the old ginch, through her false fangs. "Maybe he's packing a gat."

Sure enough, they search me.

"No rod," says the Nose, from behind me. He lets me go. The old ginch sighs.

"Too bad," she says. "I'm just dying to conk somebody."

"Cheer up, Bertha," says the Nose. "We'll get a wrongo yet, and then we'll all get together and put the boots to him."

Then the Nose turns to me. He is a little shorty guy, and besides a nose he has arms and legs—but very little else. As a matter of fact, you have to look around the nose to find his face, and when you get to it it's hardly worth the trouble.

Nevertheless he gives me the old inspection section by section, and a very cold glint comes into his eye. Matching the cold glint of the knife he suddenly pulls out of his pants-leg.

"Who are you, buddy?" he asks. "Answer before I let the air out of your tires."

Not wishing to be deflated, I tell him my name and business in a flurry of hurry. "I am an old friend of Happy Pappy," I conclude. "And I wish to spend a few days here with him."

He looks relieved. So do I, when he puts the knife back in his garter.

"Oh, that's different," he says. "You want to hide out here, eh? The heat's on for you up North, I suppose? What you do—rub out a John Law?"

"I am just on vacation," I tell him.

The old ginch cackles. "That's the way," she says. "Play it smart. Don't spill anything. You can't trust these goons around here. Bet you really pull a job! Look like a killer to me."

The Nose smiles. "Meet one of our regulars," he says, pointing at the old ginch. "This is Lower Bertha. Used to work the old Pullman car racket."

"Pullman car racket?" I inquire.

"Tell you how I do it," she confides. "Rent a lower berth in a Pullman, see? Then during the night I take the old brace and bit and drill right through the top into the upper berth, get me? The drill works easy. Usually bores right through the guy sleeping in the upper berth without even waking him up. As soon as I figure he croaks, I just slip out, climb into the upper berth, and goniff with his dough and jewelry. Then I do a quick sneak off the train before morning."

Upper Bertha hands me a dazzling smile with her fake molars, but I do not feel like smiling when I hear this charming bedtime story. I feel like shaking, and do.

The Nose laughs. "Bertha is handing you a line," he tells me. "She does not pull off such a job in the last fifteen

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years. And she never does it in the old days just to be mean. It is only to help support her dear mother in Reform School."

UPPER BERTHA is very indignant. "That doesn't matter," she snaps. "I am famous for my bloodthirstiness. Mr. Feep, if you don't believe me, I will be glad to show you my press clippings. They say I am the most cold-blooded woman killer of the century. Never mind what this old fogey here says. He's just a cheap axe-murderer. One of the *hoi polloi*."

"What do you mean, a cheap axe-murderer?" snarls the Nose, offended. "You call bumping off a whole family of seven a cheap job? Why, it takes me an hour just to re-sharpen the axe and have it ready for the cops when they come for me."

I break up this little reminiscence session in a hurry.

"Where is Happy Pappy?" I ask.

"Tell you about that at dinner," says the Nose. "Better come on in. We're just sitting down. You'll enjoy the meal. We got a great cook," he tells me, leading me into the dining room. "Arsenic Arnold. Remember how he poisons his wife?"

So everything is fine. I sit down to dinner with a bunch of murderers and eat a meal cooked by a poisoner.

The rest of the mob is worse. I meet Snake Malone, who sells rotten alky in the Prohibition days, and Torpedo Tony, once known as Public Enemy Number One to Thirteen, inclusive, and an aged tomato by the name of Violent Violet, who once runs her husband through a meat-grinder.

Of course, they are all very old now, and when it is quiet you can hear their arteries hardening. The Nose walks with a cane, and Lower Bertha has false teeth, and Snake Malone has an ear trumpet the size of a public address horn. Torpedo Tony, the Public Enemy, hasn't enough strength left to pull the trigger on a water-pistol, and Violent Violet couldn't turn the handle on a slot machine any more.

But all they talk about is mobs and hiding out and putting the heat on and tipping over joints and taking it on the lam. It is very picturesque to hear all these quaint sayings and it makes me think back to the days of my youth.

Still, it is hard to get along with these old rascals, because they are always bragging about their scrapbooks and who has the longest police record and which one kills the most.

Finally I drag the conversation around to Happy Pappy once again.

"Where is Happy Pappy?" I ask.

A dead silence falls over the table, and does not pick itself up again, either.

"I am afraid he is rubbed out," says Violent Violet, at last. "About a week ago he takes a powder to his old homestead." She sighs. "He says he is coming back in time to listen to the nightly police calls on short-wave broadcast, but he never shows up. And that is seven days ago. Somebody must slip him a Mickey or something."

"This is news to me," I say. "I never know Happy Pappy has any enemies who will lay violent hands on him. Why he is the best-loved pickpocket in the business. And what is all this about an old homestead? I always figure he lives right here."

"He does," says Arsenic Arnold, coming in with coffee and dessert. "But he also has an old shack back in the Everglades. His folks live there years ago when they smuggle slaves. And he says last week he will go back and visit it after fifty years for old times' sake."

I GET up. "You mean to tell me you let an old whacker like Happy

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Pappy wander around alone? The poor old scoundrel is over ninety. Maybe he's sick or lost. I'm ashamed of all of you! I'll go out and look for him myself."

"Not until morning," says Lower Bertha. "Those Everglades are pretty mean swamps. Lots of alligators there, and I don't mean the kind that like swing music, either."

"All right," I decide. "But first thing in the morning, I am going to go up there and find out what happens to Happy Pappy."

I spend the evening quietly, going through a lot of old WANTED FOR MURDER and REWARD posters the gang shows me in their scrapbooks, and listening to *Crime Busters* on the radio with Snake Malone. Then I have to hear Torpedo Tony tell me how he wins his *Junior G-Man* badge for eating breakfast food.

I get to bed early, making sure that Lower Bertha isn't hiding under the mattress with her brace and bit, and by eight the next morning I am driving a rented car up to the Everglades.

Directions are not so good, and I make slow time. If it is not for the fact that the Nose has a lot of stolen gasoline on hand, I would never make it at all.

But I follow the map they give me, and pretty soon I am going down some dark and dismal roads into the Everglade swamps.

There is some pretty creepy scenery here, and enough moss on the trees to make the Smith Brothers green with envy. I twist and turn along the trail, and finally I pull up twenty miles from the nearest hot-dog stand and walk down the road the map shows.

I thud through the mud, I mush through the brush, I wade through the Everglades. Until at last I reach a little ramshackle shack down near the water. This must be Happy Pappy's old homestead.

As far as I can see, the place is deserted. There is nothing around but a bunch of snakes, and none of them resemble Happy Pappy.

I open the door of the shack and look inside. It is dark, but empty.

"Yoohoo!" I mention, in a loud manner.

"Who is it?" says a soft voice.

I turn around and nearly fall down. There is a brat standing behind me.

A very tiny brat it is, with long golden curls, and a sweet smile, like the moppets in the laxative ads. The funny thing about it is that it wears cast-off clothes that once belong to a large man. The sleeves and pants-legs are rolled up. So are the brat's big blue eyes.

"Pardon me, urchin," I say, very politely. "But can you possibly tell me where in blue-blasted blazes I can find an old baboon by the name of Happy Pappy?"

The urchin grins.

"I am Happy Pappy," lisps the urchin.

"You are slap-happy," I snarl. "Listen, you sawed-off little squirt, I am in no mood for idle banter, see? Where is the old jerk?"

"But I tell you," says the moppet. "I am Happy Pappy."

"Please," I coax him, grabbing him by the neck just to emphasize my remarks. "I am looking for an old fink, see? Happy Pappy is so old he starts out as a card-sharp on Noah's Ark."

"You are mistaken," lisps the tyke. "I am Happy Pappy and I can prove it."

"How?" I inquire.

"Here," says the kid, lifting some articles from his pocket. "This is your watch and this is your wallet—right? I lift them off you while you clutch me by the throat."

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I shake my head. Nobody but Happy Pappy has such a delicate touch.

"You are Lefty Feep," says the moppet. "I remember you, see? And I tell you, pal, I am Happy Pappy all right."

"But I don't get it," I sigh. "How come you are suddenly a little boy instead of an old vulture?"

"IT IS all a mistake," says the kid. "I am kind of glad you look me up. I am ashamed to go back to the Old Crook's Home looking like this. I don't know what I can do. And what happens to me is so distressing."

"Tell me about it," I suggest.

Happy Pappy smiles up at me. "Do you ever hear of Ponce de Leon?" he asks.

"What race does the nag run in?" I inquire.

"Ponce de Leon is not a horse, he is a man," explains Happy Pappy, tossing his head and waving his golden curls. "He is the personality who looks for the Fountain of Youth."

"I never go in drug stores," I remark.

"Let me explain," says Happy Pappy. And he does. I listen to his story, and it runs something like this.

Ponce de Leon is an old Spanish customer who lives in the days of the *conquistadores*. *Conquistadore* is a Spanish word meaning hi-jacker—at least these babies are always hanging around Spanish galleons or whatever, and they come over to this country to heist gold and silver and jewels from the Indians.

But Ponce is a little different than the other hi-jackers. In fact he as a hi-jacker is not so high. He is getting pretty old and cold, and what he is interested in is how he can put his big paunch into a suit of armor these days, and how to keep from doddering.

In a word, he is hot for rejuvenation or whatever. And he hears a song and dance from some Indians in front of a cigar-store in Havana, about a Fountain of Youth. A big stream somewhere in Florida with bubbling waters . . . a stream that washes away the wrinkles faster than the soap flakes that advertise on the radio. One dip in this stream, say the Indians, and you come out a new man. It takes years off your shoulders.

Nobody knows exactly where this wonder water flows, but the legend says it is somewhere in Florida.

So Ponce gets his trigger men together, climbs in one of these Spanish galleons, and sets sail for the Everglades. He twists the locks on the Florida Keys and lands on the coast. He gallops through the swamps like an old fogey, trying to find this Fountain of Youth and addle his way back to adolescence.

But according to the hysterical accounts, he never finds it. He gets all the way to the Mississippi River and back, and croaks like a frog in the swamps.

Ever since, various explorers and real estate men are searching for the Fountain of Youth. But no score.

That is the way Happy Pappy explains it.

"Don't tell me you find this dream stream?" I explode, when he finishes.

Happy Pappy nods, looking up at me with a grin on his moppet's mug.

"Don't I look that way?" he says.

"But how—why?"

"I come back here a week ago," he tells me. "I figure I will spend a few days alone here in the woods, because I get fed up with that crowd at the Old Crook's Home. They are always after me to teach them tricks and show them how to goniff fillings from teeth and other difficult thefts. At my age it is a little difficult and I need a rest.

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"So I sneak down here. And I run right into the very thing Ponce de Leon is looking for, hundreds of years ago.

"OF COURSE I do not know it at the time. Every morning I go down to the water, there, in back of the shack, and brush my teeth. I even drink a little of it from time to time, as a chaser, because I have plenty of alky on hand.

"After a couple of days I do not clean my teeth any more. I just take them out and throw them away.

"Because I find new teeth—not store teeth—growing in my mouth!

"It is then that I make an inspection of my reflection in the water and see that I am growing younger. You can imagine how I feel about this deal. I get so excited I drink about a quart of the stuff before going to sleep that night.

"This turns out to be too much. Because when I wake up the next morning—yesterday—I am nothing but a moppet. Yes, in my sleep I start a one-man youth movement of my own. I go to bed in my second childhood and I wake up in my third!

"So here I am, just a barefoot boy with shoes on."

This is a very remarkable yarn that Happy Pappy untangles for me, and I can only shake my head while I look at his boyish bobbings.

"Don't you believe me?" lisps Happy Pappy.

"Why not?" I say. "But I would like to see this Fountain of Juvenility."

"Come along," says Happy Pappy, leading me with little short steps down the path to the water behind the shack.

I stare down at a wide pool in the swamp, which lies all by itself, surrounded by rocks.

"Looks very much like ordinary water to me," I say with a frown—because if there is anything I hate, it is ordinary water.

"Look again," says Happy Pappy.

I notice this time that the stuff is a little off-color. A very mellow yellow, with bubbles rising from it like champagne.

"I figure there must be a hidden spring underneath," Happy Pappy tells me. "It probably dries up after a while, which is why the pool never grows any bigger."

"What about rains?" I ask.

"The rocks overhanging the pool keep rainwater out and so the stuff stays pure," he mentions.

I walk all around the pool and shake my head.

"I grieve that I cannot believe you," I admit. "But this looks like ordinary mineral water to me."

"Then why not try it?" urges Happy Pappy. "Take a little snort for sport."

"All right," I say. I bend down and start to ulp a gulp.

"Take it easy," yells Happy Pappy. "Just a little swallow or you will be an infant in an instant."

I grin and shake my head, but as I taste the water I get a surprise. It burns like fire and makes me tingle all over as though somebody gives my tongue the hotfoot. All at once I know that Happy Pappy doesn't mean maybe when he says I'll be a baby. Just a few drops trickle over my tonsils and I suddenly feel very different.

MEANWHILE I raise my noggin and stare at my reflection in the pool. My reflection shows a lighter complexion. The wrinkles are coming out of my forehead. The bags under my eyes gradually shrink. To tell the truth, I feel like a youth!

I stare at myself for a long while and all at once I grin.

"Come on!" I shout to Happy Pap-

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py. "We must go to town right away."

Happy Pappy shakes his head.

"Why do you frown on town?" I expostulate which is even more high-class than asking.

"What can a little boy like me do in town?" he comes back, logically. "I am just a poor little brat now, after drinking too much of this water."

"How would you like to be a rich little brat?" I suggest.

"Try me and see," he says. "But how will I get rich?"

"By making money."

"And how will I make money?"

"You will make money like water," I tell him. "With water. With this water from the Fountain of Youth."

"I will?"

"Better than that, *we* will," I correct him. "Every drop of this fabulous fluid is worth its weight in platinum. Don't you realize that we have here something that will be the rejuvenation of the nation?

"Think of all the old guys with monkey glands and all the over-ripe tomatoes that go to beauty parlors to get their pusses hoisted. With a gulp of this wonder water you don't need to have your face lifted.

"Don't you understand? We will start a chain of beauty parlors and clean up. Life begins at eighty, that's our motto."

Happy Pappy starts to grin. He catches on.

"Get some bottles from the shack," I instruct him. "We will take some of this juvenile juice back to town."

"But we can't let anyone find out about this stuff," he objects. "Better leave it all here."

"We must take some for analysis," I say. "We must find out just how much of a swallow a person can take to get young, without overdoing it the way you do. We must experiment."

Happy Pappy agrees. He hustles and rustles up some bottles. We walk back to the pool and fill the bottles with the water. This we stick in the car and we're off to town.

I still cannot get used to Happy Pappy as a little boy. I have to boost him up into the front seat of the car next to me, and drive very careful over the bumps in the road so he does not fall out, being so light and small.

It is all very vexing and perplexing, and I wonder what the gang at the Crook of the Month Club home will think of it.

In fact I mention this to Happy Pappy as we ride merrily along.

"For the sake of my poor old wife and kiddies in Leavenworth," moans Happy Pappy, "do not tell those thugs who I am. Introduce me as your nephew or something. They will give me a terrific ribbing if they find out what happens. I will think of a way to break the news gently."

"All right," I agree. "You will be my nephew. I will say that I meet you in town on the way back. But what will I report about seeing you at the shack in the Everglades?"

"Just say I am staying there a while longer," suggests Happy Pappy. "Tell them I am brushing up on my pick-pocketing by practising on a window dummy I keep out there. Tell them I am trying to steal teeth from alligators. Tell them a cyclone comes up and I am waiting to pick an air-pocket. Tell them anything but the truth. For you that should be easy."

I frown at this, but there is no other way out. I will do as he says.

IT IS as dark as Hitler's future by the time we arrive at the little house on the side street where the gang hangs out.

I go up the steps, leading Happy

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Pappy by the hand, and carrying the bottles full of age-exterminator along to hide on the porch before the bunch can see it.

Then I knock and the Nose sticks out of the slot in the door. When the Nose recognizes me he lets me in.

"Where do you hide out all day?" he asks. "Where is Happy Pappy and who is this hunk of brat poison?" he inquires, trying to kick the moppet at my side.

"Kindly do not put the boots to my nephew," I request. "I pick him up in town where he is training to be a jockey. To answer your other questions, I go out to the Everglades and see Happy Pappy but he does not wish to return with me. He is practising up on some new pickpocket tricks."

"New tricks?"

"Well," I explain, "with all the women wearing slacks these days, he is learning how to pick slack-pockets as well as he can trouser-pockets. I figure he will be practised up in a couple of days and come home."

The Nose takes these remarks all right and we go down to the dining room. The rest of the bunch is already hobbling in for gobbling.

I introduce my nephew to Arsenic Arnold and Lower Bertha and Violent Violet and Torpedo Tony and Snake Malone.

"Pardon me, Uncle Lefty," says my fake nephew. "I will go wash my hands before I eat."

Everybody looks at him, thinking he is a sissy.

"I never leave finger prints around," he explains. Everybody smiles at this.

"Pretty smart punk," says the Nose, after little Happy Pappy leaves the room. "We can learn such a urchin a lot of things. I will teach him how to handle an axe and Torpedo Tony can wise him up about Tommy-guns."

"It's always good for a growing child to have a proper education," agrees Violent Violet. "They don't teach them anything at Reform School any more."

Happy Pappy comes back, and Arsenic Arnold beats it into the kitchen to serve the food.

Then for the next twenty minutes there is silence, except when Lower Bertha hits Snake Malone over the head with a plate for trying to swipe her potato.

Gradually the gravy stains begin to dry on the faces around the table and Arsenic Arnold serves coffee. Everybody drinks.

"Funny-tasting coffee," comments the Nose. "Where do you steal it this time, Arnold?"

"From the regular place," Arnold comes back.

"Well, it tastes stronger. Damn this rationing, anyhow."

"I steal as best I can," objects Arsenic Arnold. "Every morning I walk myself sick just to do my regular daily shoplifting. If you mugs have any complaints you can get a new cook."

"No complaints," says the Nose, in a hurry. "We like your cooking. And this coffee is swell. We'll all drink it down to the last drop."

Which they do. That is, everybody but little Happy Pappy and myself, who never touch anything stronger than whiskey.

I AM just reaching for my cup like the others, when Happy Pappy nudges me. "Shhh," he whispers. "Don't touch it. When I leave the room I pour some of our anti-senility special in the coffee-pot."

"Why do you do such a thing?" I whisper back. "Are you going screwy in your young age?"

"You want to experiment with the stuff, don't you?" he comes back.

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"Well, here's our chance. I only use a little and we will see how far it works. Also I want to break the news of who I am very gently. This is one way to do it."

I do not think it is such a good way, but it is too late now. I sit back and watch them finish their coffee and then I watch their coffee finish them.

Because once the coffee is down it gets in its work very, very quickly, and in just a few seconds I see a youth movement sweeping around the room.

Everybody seems to notice this change at the same time. They sit there with mouths hanging open, watching the years roll back.

There is nothing to say, so they all compromise by gasping.

My eyes roll faster than a pair of loaded dice in the hands of a guy with epilepsy. I stare at each changing face. Age is melting off like butter. Wrinkles vanish. White hair darkens. Crows-feet march away.

The Nose is now a guy of about 35, and his schnozz fades from deep purple to a blushing pink.

Arsenic Arnold is a handsome young squirt of 25 or thereabouts, because he takes his coffee without cream in it.

Torpedo Tony sprouts a thick head of hair and a black mustache.

Snake Malone, who is formerly just an old goof, now looks like a young goof.

But the big change comes over the two ginches. Lower Bertha sheds about 60 pounds and turns into a very striking brunette item. Violent Violet is a lovely redhead.

They look at each other and point and gawk, and then they all begin to yammer at once.

"What's happening?"

"Look at me—how come?"

"Hey—what goes on here?"

Little Happy Pappy climbs up on the table and raps a fork against the Nose's ditto for silence.

Then he begins to explain in a squeaky voice. He tells who he is, and how he finds the Fountain and what I suggest we can do with the juvenile gargle.

His remarks are greeted with cheers. Then everybody rushes for the mirror to take a squint at the strange change.

They are all delighted.

THEY nudge and point at each other and the hoods keep looking at the two molls and whistling, and I stand there and wait for something to happen.

It does.

"This calls for a celebration!" yells Arsenic Arnold.

"Sure it does," says Lower Bertha. "Who shall we kill?"

"That's not what I mean," Arnold comes back. "We ought to go out to a night spot and make whoopee."

"Fine," says Violent Violet. "I haven't been able to dance the Charleston for years."

I grin, realizing that to these personalities, nothing happens since 1925 or thereabouts.

"Let's hop in the car and go out on a good tear," says the Nose.

Which is why, half an hour later, we are all sitting in the Sunstroke Club, one of the most exclusive dumps in Miami.

I stare around the table again, still not quite believing what I see. An hour ago all my friends are old crooks. Now they are young crooks.

For some reason I do not think this is a great improvement. These faces are more youthful, but they look a lot tougher. And my companions are acting a lot tougher, too.

The minute the waiter comes up they begin to yell for liquor. When they

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get it, they yell for more. This goes on for quite some time. They drink like fish.

I suddenly realize that this bunch is used to drinking in the old Prohibition days where you slug the stuff down and ask what it is later—if you are still alive.

From time to time Lower Bertha and Violent Violet grab a partner and attempt to do the Charleston. This helps the other dancers on the floor like an attack of bunions. In fact, within a very few minutes my friends attract a lot of attention.

Because when they get tipsy they get ideas, and when they get ideas they get active, and when they get active they get results.

To make a long story gory, pretty soon there is nobody left at our table except little Happy Pappy and myself. We look around and try to locate our bunch and see the following interesting items:

(a) Violent Violet is sitting on some guy's lap stroking his hair with one hand and clawing the hair of his girl friend with the other.

(b) Snake Malone is arguing with the manager over at the next table. He is trying to persuade him to throw out his regular liquor stock and put in bootleg alky. "You'll do it or else—" he yells, grabbing the manager by the collar and leering.

(c) Lower Bertha is underneath the manager's table. She crawls beneath his chair and begins to drill up through the seat with a brace and bit.

"We've got to get them out of here before trouble starts," I tell Happy Pappy. "I'll try and locate the others in a hurry."

I rush around, looking for the missing links in our chain-gang.

Finally, through the swinging doors I detect Arsenic Arnold.

HE IS out in the kitchen, of course, and I can see he is pouring the contents of a little bottle into the consomme. Like all the rest, he is young again and up to his old tricks.

I yank him out of there by the scruff of his neck. In the lounge outside I run smack into Torpedo Tony. He is very busy in a little human weight-lifting act of his own. By human weight-lifting I mean he is holding up a lot of people.

He has a Roscoe in one hand and is backing the customers up against the wall.

"Stick 'em up," he suggests, waving his not-so-Gabriel heater.

Out of the corner of my other eye, I see Violent Violet wrestling with a dame, Lower Bertha drilling through the manager's chair and part of the manager most likely to be in that vicinity; and Snake Malone is finishing up the liquor in a hurry by breaking bottles over a waiter's head.

Then I stop looking and start hearing.

Sirens wail outside. Somebody calls the police, of course.

I rush into the dance-and-dine room and grab my Scout troop in a hurry.

We reach the door—Violet, Bertha, Tony, Arnold, Snake, Happy Pappy and myself. At the same time the cops break the door in from the other side.

We back away.

"This way!" shouts a voice. I turn around. The Nose stands behind us, waving an axe he grabs from a fire-box on the wall.

He swings the axe into the back door and smashes it open. We run.

I am in the rear, trying to help Happy Pappy with his short little legs.

"What are we running for anyway?" I gasp. "We don't do anything, you and I."

"Oh yeah? says Happy Pappy.

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I stare at him. With every step he takes, stuff falls out of Happy Pappy's pockets. Rings and jewelry and bracelets bounce down his trouser-legs. Knives and forks slide from his sleeves. He is back to picking pockets again, too!

We make a sally into the alley and the cops pile out after us. But Snake Malone has the car running when we reach it and we jump on and it's off to see the wizard. Or rather, the lizard. Because Happy Pappy yells, "Head for the swamps!"

We head.

"We'll hide out in my shack in the Everglades," he pants, as we settle down into our seats and Snake Malone shatters the speed record.

THE cops follow us, but after a wild hour they get lost somewhere between the third and fourth alligator as we tear down the dark, winding roads that lead towards Happy Pappy's shack and the Fountain of Youth.

All through the bumping and thumping of the ride, I am doing a bit of heavy thinking.

Happy Pappy makes a terrible mistake when he feeds fresh youth to these old rascals. Now they are back in their prime and they will be a menace to society and so forth. It is most unfortunate. And there is nothing to do about it.

I am not calmed down any by what happens when we arrive at the shack.

We climb out, go in, and sit down at the table after Happy Pappy brings some candles out to light.

Snake Malone is still wandering out in the swamp, parking the car and looking over the lay of the land.

He comes in grinning.

"I just case the joint," he reports, "and it's a pipe! They'll never find us here. And by the way, Happy Pappy, I see this Fountain of Youth you have in the back yard. And it gives me a remarkable idea."

"But we already have an idea, Snake," says Happy Pappy. "We are going to open beauty parlors and make everybody young."

Snake Malone laughs It is a very disturbing sort of laugh, and out in the swamps several alligators run like hell when they hear it.

"No you don't," he informs Happy Pappy. "I have a better idea. We are not going to sell our water to everybody."

"We aren't?"

"Of course not. Why be so common and vulgar? We will sell it only to very exclusive customers."

"Such as?"

"Gangsters," says Snake Malone. "Gangsters."

"But there are very few gangsters," objects Happy Pappy. "Most of them are in the clink. They will not get out of stir until they serve very long stretches."

"That is just the point. After serving long stretches we catch them at just the very time they need water from the Fountain of Youth. Suppose a judge sends you up for fifty years, when you are only thirty. By the time you get out you are eighty. Wouldn't you pay heavy sugar for a drink that makes you thirty again?"

Happy Pappy catches on, and so do the rest of them.

"We will be rich indeed," Snake Malone goes on. "Think of it—we will revolutionize the entire underworld. No crime wave will be complete without our water!

"Nobody will be afraid of having a beak send them up the river. When they get out they plank down their dough, gulp down a drink, and start all over again."

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Everybody slaps Snake Malone on the back and tells him he is a genius. Everybody but Happy Pappy and yours truly, that is.

Snake Malone looks at me with a glare that makes the corpuscles glitter in his bloodshot eyes.

"What do you think of my idea, Lefty?" he asks.

"I don't like it," I tell him. "This water can be a great benefit to all mankind. Instead you want it to be a boon for goons."

"And just what are you going to do about it, Lefty?" asks Snake Malone.

"I am not going to allow it," I gulp. "I do not think that this wonderful water should be misused. And I will not play the part of a water-boy for a crooked team."

EVIDENTLY this remark reminds them of a football game, because I am suddenly tackled from the rear. I go down for a loss, and in the middle of the scrimmage I find myself tied up with a stout rope. The Nose and Torpedo Tony bind me to a chair.

"Now," says Snake Malone. "Any other objections?"

He looks at Happy Pappy. But little Happy Pappy isn't so happy any more. He stares at me and sighs, and I can see he is sorry about starting all this. But he is too small a fry to tangle with this mob of gangsters.

"No objections," he squeaks.

"Good," Snake Malone remarks. "From now on I will take charge. And if I hear a squawk out of anybody I will turn that squawk into a death-rattle. Understand? Now take Lefty into the bedroom and tie him down. Good night and pleasant screams."

That is how I pass my time the next twenty-four hours. I am tied down in bed.

About noon the next day Happy Pappy sneaks in and feeds me.

"I am very conscience-stricken about starting such a mess," he confesses. "But what can I do now? It is too late. They are already draining the swamp."

"Draining it?"

"Early this morning Torpedo Tony goes to town and steals a big truck with a lot of empty tanks in it. Somewhere else he manages to find a pump attachment. The rest of them are out in the swamp all day, siphoning up the water.

"The Fountain of Youth is gone, Lefty. It's all stored in the tanks now. The swamp is dry."

"Yes," says a voice over his shoulder. The Nose is standing there. "Now we are ready to leave this snug little hide-out and head for the big town. We'll be out of reach of the bulls and ready to promote with our rejuvenation juice."

The others crowd into the bedroom after him. Now Arsenic Arnold sticks his neck out of the mob.

"But first we have a little job to do, Lefty," he remarks. "That is why we visit you."

"What is the job?" I ask.

"Why, we are going to bump you off," he tells me.

I shudder. I always shudder when I hear all this 1925-vintage slang. It is very poor English. I do not like the grammar and right now I do not like the idea, either.

"We cannot take a chance of leaving you here, Lefty," says Arnold. "When the cops come you are liable to sing. Surely you understand how it is. We really must kill you."

"You are a dirty, double-crossing crook," I inform him.

"Now Lefty, flattery won't help you any," smiles Arsenic Arnold. "What we must decide now is the method we will use to exterminate you. I suggest a little poison."

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The Nose sneers a long sneer.

"YOU and your poison," he says. "All that fuss and bother cooking it up. Let me handle the job with an axe. It will all be over within a second. A split second, if I handle the axe right."

"Too messy," says Lower Bertha. "Let me get him with my drill."

"Oh, you and your old drill!" sniffs Violent Violet. "You'd think nobody else knows how to kill a man around here! There's a meat-grinder in the kitchen. Let me handle this case. Feep would make swell hamburger."

Torpedo Tony shoulders his way through the crowd.

"Trouble with all of you," he says, "is that you're too hysterical. Too flighty, see? We want to get rid of this lug without leaving no messy stains. No clues, get me? Now I'll just take Feep out into the swamp and bury him up to his neck in the mud. The alligators can do the rest. And there won't be no traces, understand? Just a nice, quiet mud-bath out where the Fountain of Youth once is."

"Maybe you're right," says the Nose.

He grabs my legs. Tony grabs my arms. They carry me out back of the shack. Sure enough, I see that the Fountain of Youth is gone. Nothing but an empty mud-swamp remains. Next to it stands the big enclosed truck with the tanks inside, all filled up with water.

"Dump him," says Tony. I flop in the mud.

"Now we will dig a little hole and plant this lily," the Nose suggests.

I roll around in the sticky wet mud while they make with a shovel. I am on the edge of the grave, you might say.

They get a nice deep hole. Then they lift me up. I am dripping with mud, and also perspiration. It looks like my pals are going to do me dirt.

"Cheese it, the cops!"

The voice roars into our ears.

Snake Malone comes roaring into our midst.

"I'm playing lookout up the road a way," he pants. "Just now I see the bluecoats heading into the swamp on motorcycles. We've got to scram."

"What about Lefty?" says Tony.

"Throw him in the back of the truck," yells Malone. "We're all packed, ready to go. We can't wait and let the law find him. We'll drop him along the road somewhere."

So everybody runs around collecting their stuff, and tossing it in the back of the truck between the tanks. This stuff includes me. I land with a dull thud and pass out.

When I come to, we are jolting along. The whole crew sits up in front and I am alone in the back, bouncing up and down. The tanks full of water from the Fountain are bumping around close to my head.

I sit up and strain at my ropes. The mud is drying all over me.

All at once the ropes come loose. I wonder why, because they are tied very tight, when I get trussed up last night. Now they are loose. Why?

THEN I understand. I just get a mud-bath. The mud comes from the Fountain of Youth. The water in the mud makes me younger. I must lose an inch or so of girth around the middle and a little around the wrists and ankles. Now I can wriggle out of my ropes.

I do.

Then I get to work.

As we roll along the road, I grope in the back and find Lower Bertha's brace-and-bit. She throws the drill into the back when we leave. Now I have it and I use it.

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There is only one thing to do. I can't let these crooks sell Fountain of Youth water to a bunch of criminals the way they plan to do it. So I bore into each tank with the drill. One by one, I empty the tanks. The water splashes out of the sides and runs into the road behind.

I keep out of the way of the stream and watch it trickle in back of the truck. Wherever it hits the asphalt, the cracks and wrinkles in the road disappear and the road looks new and fresh again.

It makes me heave a sigh to see millions just evaporating like this, but what can I do?

It makes me heave a groan when I feel the truck stop after a long while, but what can I do?

We are pulling up on the side of the road. I look out and see a New Jersey highway marker.

Suddenly I realize I must be unconscious for maybe 24 hours in back of that truck instead of a few minutes. It is now late afternoon again—but I am out for almost a day.

Here we are, stopping in New Jersey. The water is gone, thank goodness. But now they will come around and find me, and I will be gone, too.

But I am helpless. I hear them talking and grumbling up in front. And then footsteps approach the rear.

"Looks deserted all right," says the Nose.

"We'll toss him into the cranberry bogs over there," Snake Malone snarls.

"Sure is good to get a rest," sighs Violent Violet. "A full day of driving like that is enough to make anybody sick. No stops, no food, nothing to drink."

"Stop squawking," Arsenic Arnold tells her. "We have to drive like this to shake off the law. Now we're safe. We can rub out Feep and head for the big town right away. Let's go."

The voices get louder.

I crouch there in the back of the truck, waiting. I have no weapons but the brace-and-bit and it is no good against Snake Malone and the rest. I remember Torpedo Tony has a gun. He also has a temper, and when he sees what I do to the water from the Fountain of Youth, I am sure I will be bogged down in the cranberries very shortly.

The Nose sniffs into the back of the truck.

"All right, Lefty," he calls. "Here's where you get off.

"What the blazes?" he inquires earnestly. "You aren't tied up any more."

"No," I sneer. "But you'll be fit to be tied when you see what I accomplish."

THEY haul me out and look at the tanks.

I am ready to die now. Because, at least, I give all these dirty crooks the shock of their lives.

"You blasted such and such!" howls Snake Malone. "You drain our tanks on us!"

The rest of them take a squint and begin to jump up and down in rage.

Only Happy Pappy is quiet. He sneaks up to me and whispers, "Good work, Lefty. I'm proud of you. I will try to come back and see that you get a nice funeral."

This is not very consoling. Neither is Snake Malone. He clips me one on the side of the noggin and hauls me down. Torpedo Tony caresses my ribs with his gun.

"Oh, oh, oh!" wails Arsenic Arnold. "You have to go and spill all that wonderful water and spoil our plans! I figure I will be rich and open a lovely restaurant."

"I plan on a hamburger stand," says

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Violent Violet, beginning to sniffle.

"I expect to corner the alky racket in six states," Torpedo Tony sobs. "It is enough to drive a man to drink."

"Yes," yells Arsenic Arnold. "Give me a drink! Give us all a drink before we rub out this louse who spoils everything!"

"I'm dying for a shot," says Lower Bertha. "Look—he's ruined my drill, too!"

Happy Pappy comes forward with a grin. He pulls a flask of colorless stuff from his hip pocket.

"You want a drink?" he says. "Here it is. I figure on this and save some gin for us. Everybody have some."

Arsenic Arnold grabs the bottle and opens it.

Then he frowns.

"Oh no," he says, softly. "I know your tricks, Happy Pappy. You put Fountain of Youth water in our coffee and we get young. I bet you have such water in the flask, too. If we drink it we turn into babies and then you and your pal Lefty will be free. None of your tricks, Happy Pappy."

He throws the flask away. Happy Pappy sigh and shrugs.

"We will drink from my bottle," says Arsenic Arnold. "Good whiskey."

And they do.

They spin the bottle around and I watch it drain dry.

This is one time in my life I would appreciate a drink, but nobody offers it to me. They swallow and let me wallow.

And then the whole gang marches me off into the swamps in the twilight. We go into the bog and I walk my last mile. Torpedo Tony holds the gun at my back.

"Here," he says, when we get way off the road.

"Now," he says.

And now is when it happens.

All at once I notice his voice get squeaky. High. And then I look at him. He is not so high. He is low. Low and tiny. And getting smaller.

I stare around the circle. They are also smaller. They scream, but their voices break like the whimpers of moppets, and the gang doesn't even come up to my waist.

In a minute I grab the gun from Torpedo Tony's tiny fingers.

"All right, kids," I say. "Come on. Follow me."

They do.

BY THE time we reach the truck again I almost have to carry the littlest ones. I pile them into the front seat, crying like mad, and Happy Pappy and I drive off.

Of course, on the way down the road Happy Pappy tells me how he fills up a flask with water from the Fountain of Youth. He knows they will not drink it if he gives it to them, so he plays a little trick. He colors it up a little to look like whiskey.

Being a pickpocket, he switches flasks with Arsenic Arnold in the truck while they drive, so Arsenic Arnold really has the kiddy cocktail in his bottle.

They drink it, and we escape.

So I drive here from Jersey in two days, and when I arrive I take all the children to an orphanage and leave them.

I hope they get the right training in the orphanage, so when they grow up again they will be decent, law-abiding citizens instead of a bunch of crooks.

* * *

LEFTY FEEP sat back as he finished his story.

"That is the truth about the Fountain of Youth," he said.

I nodded. "Very interesting," I told him. "And quite convincing."

Feep nearly jumped out of his chair.

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"What?" he yelled. "You actually believe me for once?"

I smiled. "Why not?"

"No foolish questions about why things happen?"

"Why should there be any questions, Lefty? You've explained everything."

Feep scratched his head. "I don't get it," he confessed. "You usually are such a critic."

I cleared my throat. "Just one thing puzzles me, though. A very minor thing. You say it only took one day for the gang to drive from Florida to New Jersey."

"Right."

"But after the gang became children it took you two days just to get from New Jersey to New York. Why did it take so long?"

"Oh, is that all?" exclaimed Lefty Feep. "That I can explain very easy. It is just that you do not understand how very young this water makes my gangster friends."

"Very young?"

"Sure." Feep grinned. "They are extremely young children, those gangsters. That is why it takes me so long to drive a short distance.

"You see, every couple of miles I have to stop the car and take out Torpedo Tony or Snake Malone and change their diapers."

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# STOREHOUSE OF THE BODY

IF WE feel well, we seem to have a boundless amount of energy. We often wonder where this energy comes from, and some of us are not to be put off in our questioning. Our store of energy is in the food we eat and the usable parts of it. This food when broken down into simple sugars and oxygenated or burned slowly supplies us with energy. This energy is the energy which the plants took from the sun to convert these simple elements, carbon, hydrogen and oxygen into sugar which we then eat and break down to the elements and the energy. We use both the elements and the energy quite a bit in our daily life and in our entire span of life.

We are also concerned with knowing where and how the energy is kept within us, for we can surely see that if it were used up immediately, we should not be able to rise in the morning after not having eaten for the whole night. We can see that this reasoning holds even for waking hours, for we only eat three times a day and it is not incumbent upon us to eat more than that. Our bodies store the energy in the form of sugar in various parts of the body. There is always a certain amount in the blood. The blood sugar goes into normal metabolism, that is, in keeping the body going at all times. The rest of the sugar is distributed to various parts of the body and this in the form of fat. Fat is not sugar in the ordinary sense, but the body can make a sugar out of fat or vice versa because it has certain chemicals in the blood and in important parts of the body which do this work.

If we are looking for a single storehouse, we cannot find one, because the whole body is a storehouse. If this is true, where is the office of the storehouse? The office is in the largest organ of the body, the liver. The liver is located just below the diaphragm and in the upper part of the abdomen. It is huge compared to many of the other organs and its importance goes without saying. No organ compares with it in the matter of weight for it weighs more than three pounds. Consider that the head of a one-hundred-fifty-pound man weighs thirty pounds, and this is quite a bit bone, while the liver contains no bone, we can see that the liver is really weighty. If the abdomen of an animal is opened, one can scarcely see other organs if the liver is present and not cut away. Its size is justified.

When there is a demand for more energy, chemical and nerve impulses are sent to this organ and it responds by calling the fat from the fat cells, changing it into sugar and sending it to various parts of the body to be oxidized and turned into energy. The liver does much more than that. The liver contains cells which are very large and very active. These cells were noted by Kuppfer and named after him. They pick pieces from the blood as it passes through the liver and thus kill germs and constitute an important defense mechanism of the body. The liver is not the storehouse for germicides and sugar alone.

The liver is also the storehouse for metal which the body needs. As usual, the liver gets these salts from the food and saves them in its cells until the body calls for them. These metals are some very necessary ones, including copper and iron. The liver also stores blood. It does this in a rather interesting fashion. The blood enters the liver through the great portal vein and leaves

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through large veins which enter the heart. The blood filters through spaces to enter these large veins going to the heart and as the blood does this infiltration, the cells of the liver secrete things into the blood. The filters can close off and do at various times, some of them being always shut except in time of necessity. It is no wonder then, that in time of trial and tribulation, we derive energy that we thought we never had. The filters open, the blood comes rushing out, the sugars are given up, and we have qualities we never knew existed. All this is due to the liver, but the liver does even more.

The liver supplies to the blood as it passes through various substances. Mention has been made of iron and it can be said that our very life depends on this iron. The red blood cells need the iron to get oxygen from the lungs and thus to burn the sugar for its energy. Another important substance is added to the blood as it goes through the liver and that is a substance without which the blood could never clot. The liver also has the very important function of removing from the blood poisonous substances and turning them into non-poisonous substances which are excreted by the kidneys.

In addition to all these, the liver makes the anti-anemic substances without which people develop anemia. This is a terrible disease which was for a long time the scourge of mankind, and is only becoming less terrible in these bright days because of the efforts of the medical men. This disease is one in which the red blood cells, dying at a continuous rate, are not replaced by new ones with the result that the individual gets no energy by oxidation and dies. Liver extracts from other mammals are aiding greatly and in most cases are a complete cure for the lack of necessary equipment. The liver is not content with doing all this, it must do more. Our bodies are as solid as they are and as tough as they are because of the building blocks, the proteins of the body. The liver has the large task of building the building blocks from smaller units. The task is not easy but nothing is too difficult for this giant.

When we realize that in addition to all vital functions, the liver secretes into the gut via the gall bladder, we are inclined to say, this is too much. The chemistry of this secretion is quite complicated, but it suffices to say that in the absence of it the digestion and metabolism are quite upset, while too much of it, it is quite yellowish, is the cause of the not common, but prevalent yellow jaundice.

The liver is a mystery. There are only two really different kinds of cells and those are the Kuppfer cells, mentioned above, and the common liver cells. Since in other parts of the body, one cell has a single definite function, how can the liver cells have so many? The real question is not how, however, but the fact that they do. The liver does deserve much credit and its large size is completely justified. A very interesting fact is that if over half of the liver substance is cut away, the rest will regenerate that which was cut away. This is known as the "margin of safety," just like that of the engineer. We take off our hats to this great good organ.

# THUMBNAIL PLANET HISTORY

FOR thousands of years numbers have exerted much influence on human thought. Moreover, all their ramifications and properties have become a definite part of our culture. For example, from time immemorial, the number seven has been considered "lucky," whereas the number thirteen has been considered "unlucky." When the astronomers of old discovered seven moving stars in the Heavens—Saturn, Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter and Venus—they were much startled and amazed. Being of a superstitious and speculative nature, these astronomers asserted that each planet exerted a different influence on the earth at specified hours. Therefore, they named each day, for seven days, after one of the planets. Thus creating the seven-day week.

At first the early investigators adhered to the erroneous conception that the earth was the center of the universe, and that these seven planets revolved about it. However, there were certain men who thought otherwise; but there was not the equipment to really determine the real nature of the universe. Therefore, for over 1,000 years the belief that the earth was the center of the universe permeated the minds of men. Finally a Polish monk suggested that all the planets revolve about the sun, and fifty years later Galileo observed experimentally the theoretical prediction of the Polish monk. Then Kepler, the mathematical astronomer, definitely established certain laws of planetary motion after years of gathering experimental data. His laws proved that the sun was the center of our solar system.

The latest planet to be discovered is Pluto, which is far out on the borders of the solar system. It was uncovered by Clyde Tombaugh in 1930. This discovery was the culmination of a search for some body which was disturbing the motion of Uranus. Pluto is situated at such a far distance from the sun that it is too cold to possess an ordinary atmosphere. The planets in our solar system are an interesting varied group spinning about the sun. If they are the only solar system is still a matter of speculation.

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# Dinky Winky Woo

## By HAROLD LAWLOR

IF IT weren't for this Uncle Cyril's fantastic bequest, Hubert Ransom would probably have remained an amiable nonentity all his life.

The telegram came just as he was leaving his apartment. Hubert took the yellow envelope gingerly. Telegrams often contained bad news. Bad news meant trouble. And Hubert sidestepped trouble whenever possible. He frowned, and put the message in his pocket. It was too late now to read it. So late that he'd even have to take the subway if he were to reach Crystal's on time.

Almost at once, he ran into trouble.

A drunk got on at the second stop after Hubert boarded the train. And drunks, Hubert knew from unhappy past experience, seemed to have a ghastly predilection for quiet, retiring men of his type. He watched with apprehensive eyes as the very small man, who must have been at the tail end of a three-day bender to be that lit, came down the car to stand directly over him.

Hubert's opera hat amused him almost at once.

"Pipe the lid, boysh an' girlsh!" he said raucously, weaving back and forth unsteadily with the motion of the train. "Pipe lid on l'il Lor' Faun'l—Faun'l—um."

Hubert fidgeted. Everyone in the car was staring at him with broad smiles. It was very embarrassing. Very.

"Look, ev'body," commanded the drunk in stentorian tones. "Tricksh!" And he rapped Hubert's hat smartly. It didn't collapse, but settled down firmly over Hubert's burning ears.

Hubert stood up. The drunk turned pale. He hadn't realized, evidently, that Hubert sitting would be over six feet tall when standing.

"Whooo!" said the drunk, looking as if he expected to be flattened. He seemed unable to believe his eyes when Hubert merely moved to another seat at the front of the car. He grew noisily courageous then. "C'm back! C'm back, figh' like man!"

Hubert was glad when he reached his station. That obnoxious little sot! Fight, indeed! He'd long since reached the conclusion that there were few things in life worth fighting for. He thought this was because he was naturally a civilized, peace-loving soul. It didn't occur to him to think it was because he'd never yet found anything he wanted to fight for.

Nor did he dream that his Uncle Cyril's incredible legacy was soon to change all that.

CRYSTAL DELORME, her blonde hair swept high, her peerless figure swathed in a formal gown of clinging crepe, turned a cool cheek for Hubert's awed kiss.

It wasn't until after this that Hubert saw they were not alone. Slick Mobridge was watching them from a deep chair. His heart sank as Slick stood up, white teeth flashing momentarily



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**Hugh Ransom didn't mind inheriting a pet called Dinky Winky Woo--until he saw it!**



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from beneath his black hairline mustache.

"Planning a large evening, Hubert?" Slick asked genially, his black eyes taking in Hubert's immaculately tailored dinner jacket.

"Why—why, yes," Hubert stammered. "Crystal and I are going to the theater, and then—"

"No, we're not," Crystal said flatly. "I've changed my mind. I'm going out with Slick."

Hubert stared at her in amazement. "But—but you can't!"

"You object?" Crystal's marble-blue eyes watched him hopefully. "What are you going to do about it?"

Hubert wavered. What was he going to do about it? Maybe he'd just leaped to the wrong conclusion when he'd thought Crystal cared for him. If she preferred Slick, why Slick had just as much right to take her out as he had.

Slick laughed. "I guess Hubert doesn't feel like taking me apart tonight, Crystal."

"Well?" she prodded Hubert, biting her lip.

"I—I guess I have no objection," Hubert said miserably.

Slick guffawed. Crystal looked at him first in annoyance, then turned on Hubert in a fury. "I'm through with you! You amused me for a time, but I want a man who'll fight for me! A man who isn't afraid of his own shadow—or Slick."

Hubert looked at her in bewilderment. Why should he have to fight for her, if she loved him? And he wasn't afraid of Slick. Where did she ever get that idea? He opened his mouth to tell her so, but she pointed angrily to the door.

"Shut up!" she said. "And get out!"

Hubert turned away in hurt perplexity. The last thing he heard was the mocking laughter of Slick.

HUBERT wandered in a daze. What was the matter with him, anyway? He supposed that the average man in such circumstances would have pushed Slick's teeth down his throat, tucked Crystal's arm through his own, and walked out with her triumphantly.

But he— Hubert shook his head sadly. Was there such a thing as being too civilized, too peace-loving? Maybe he thought too much of the rights and wishes of others, instead of standing up for his own.

His nose twitched suddenly. He smelled the rich odor of hamburger, and looked up to see that he was passing a diner. Pushing open the door, he walked slowly into the steamy interior. It wasn't until he'd finished munching his wimpie unhappily that he reached into his pocket for a cigarette and felt the telegram rustle crisply under his hand.

In a sudden burst of recklessness, he opened the message and read it. It was bad news, in a way, though he hardly remembered his Uncle Cyril. He'd been only a child when his uncle had bought that estate in South Dakota and gone out there to live alone.

Hubert read the telegram again:

"REGRET INFORM YOU DEATH OF YOUR UNCLE CYRIL. THREE MILLION DOLLAR ESTATE BEQUEATHED TO YOU ON CONDITION YOU TAKE CARE OF UNCLE'S PET DINKY WINKY WOO UNTIL ITS DEATH. CAN YOU COME WEST FOR SETTLEMENT IMMEDIATELY?"

It was signed by some lawyer of whom Hubert had never heard.

Tears stung his eyes. If that wasn't like kind-hearted old Uncle Cyril! Thinking, even after his death, of the

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well-being of some little pet he'd loved. A kitten, maybe. Or perhaps a dog. Hubert considered this last, and hoped it was a *small* dog. Large dogs made him nervous, what with their way of leaping at you, and otherwise raising distasteful commotions.

But a little dog— Hubert squared his shoulders. He'd do it! He'd go out there and agree to anything! He wouldn't betray his uncle's trust! And maybe, in acting unselfishly, he'd be able to forget Crystal.

But he doubted it.

LAUGHING GAP, South Dakota, was a one-horse town. Uncle Cyril's estate was sixty miles beyond in the hills. But Hubert stopped off first at the lawyer's.

Malcolm Digby, the attorney, was delighted that Hubert agreed to the terms of the will. Delighted, and curiously relieved. When Hubert affixed his signature to the necessary papers, Malcolm Digby surprised him by sinking with a sigh into his swivel chair and wiping a forehead that was excessively moist.

"Something?" Hubert said.

Malcolm Digby's fat little face creased with one smile after another. "Glad. Glad you're doing this, m'boy. Very glad. Very glad, indeed!"

Hubert couldn't see any reason for the attorney's exaggerated high spirits, and he ventured to mention this aloud.

"Well, you see," Digby said, "if you *hadn't* agreed—I, as executor, would have had to take care of—uh, Dinky Winky Woo."

Hubert was aware of a slight feeling of discomfort. "Is Dinky Winky Woo a kitten, perhaps?" he asked nervously.

Digby grew cagy. Judiciously he made a steeple of his fingers. "Well, no-o-o. Strictly speaking you couldn't call him a kitten." He laughed merrily.

"I see." Hubert laughed too, at what he didn't know. "Dinky Winky Woo is a dog, then, of course. A *small* dog," he added firmly.

Digby pursed his lips, then blew them out. "Well, no-o-o. By rights, you couldn't call him a dog, either, not in so many words." He laughed merrily again.

The region around Hubert's heart grew even more distressed. He named, successively, a canary, a parrot, lovebirds, a marmoset, trained mice etc. But to all of these Digby merely shook his head, laughing heartily all the while.

"I tell you what, m'boy," Digby said finally. "Why don't you drive out to your uncle's place and see Dinky Winky Woo for yourself?"

"Very well." Hubert stood up obediently. "And then I'll come back to tell you how I—uh, like him."

Digby's smile faded. His forehead shone again wetly. "Oh, no, no, no! You needn't bother. As a matter of fact, I won't be here. I'm going away on a trip—a long trip. Mexico, maybe. Or—uh, Labrador."

Hubert thought this was singular. Very singular. But he merely said hopefully, "Well, I'm sure I'll learn to like Dinky Winky Woo—in time, that is."

Digby sprang up. "I'm sure you will! That's the spirit, m'boy. Of course, of course. Ha, ha! Goodbye!"

And the attorney practically pushed Hubert from the office. The last thing Hubert heard before the door slammed was Digby crying, "And don't forget! You can put up with a lot for three million dollars!"

The more Hubert thought that over, the less he liked the ominous sound of it.

UNCLE CYRIL'S estate was very remotely situated, deep in the

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heavily wooded hills. Back of it was a ravine—almost a small valley. The place was in the hands of Al Blodgett, who'd been Uncle Cyril's faithful servitor for years.

"Quite a character," had been Malcolm Digby's description.

Certainly Al seemed to fill the bill. He was standing in the graveled drive as Hubert drove up—a lean, bearded man with a jutting rear, his lantern-jaws moving rhythmically with some exceedingly juicy cut plug.

"You must be Al," Hubert said, holding out a hand. "I'm Uncle Cyril's nephew, Hubert Ransom."

Al looked him over carefully, spat with a rich *thukk!* and wiped his horny hand on his denim pants before shaking Hubert's.

"Pleased t'meetcha," he muttered shyly.

It was after a brief tour of Uncle Cyril's comfortable lodge that Hubert timidly suggested a view of Dinky Winky Woo. The pet had been nowhere in evidence, though he'd certainly been keeping his eyes open. Al nodded solemnly, and led him through a back door of the house. They headed up the slope toward the ravine.

"Is Dinky Winky Woo a kitten?" Hubert asked. After all, Malcolm Digby may have been pulling his leg.

Al stopped, and scratched his rear reflectively. His eyes slid away from Hubert's. "Wal, no. Don't seem as though, hardly."

*Thukk!*

They walked on slowly. There was a trembling sensation in Hubert's knees. He wiped his forehead. He was warm. Very warm.

"Perhaps," he suggested, wetting his lips, "perhaps Dinky Winky Woo is a dog? A *small* dog?"

Al stopped again. He eased the one brace that was holding up his pants. His eyes again slid away from Hubert's. "Wal, no. Don't seem as though, hardly."

*Thukk!*

THEY were over the crest of the hill and going down into the ravine now. There was a loud tramping noise coming from somewhere. And Hubert noticed, vaguely curious, that the tops of the oak trees with which the ravine was heavily wooded were quite bare. As though some tornado had denuded them of all foliage. Odd, that. Very.

"I should think," Hubert ventured, "that instead of leaving his pet out in the open Uncle Cyril would have built a little house for it."

Al stopped again. He pulled his nose, and looked at Hubert. After some seconds, he must have come to the conclusion that Hubert was jesting. For Al's eyes began to crinkle, and his shoulders heaved.

"By damn!" he gurgled. "By damn!" He rolled a mirthful eye at Hubert. "'Whyn't Cyril build a little house—'" he choked. "That's rich. That's a rich un!"

Hubert was annoyed. He couldn't see anything in the remark to make Al regard him as a second Bob Hope. He looked away. The next minute he was paralyzed.

"Look! Look!" Something was crashing toward him. He turned to run for his life, but Al gripped him by the arm. Hubert struggled mightily. "Run! My God, man, run! Look what's coming at us!"

For all his leanness, Al had a grip of steel. Try as he might Hubert couldn't break away. And onward, ever onward plunged some horrible Thing, coming straight toward them!

"Are you mad!" Hubert fought desperately with Al. "Let go! Run, man, while we can still save ourselves!"

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"Shecks!" Al drawled placidly. "H'ain't no need to run. That air critter is Dinky Winky Woo. He's one of these here now dinosaurs."

*Thukk!*

HUBERT thought afterward that he must have fainted. Or else his mind had mercifully gone into some sort of time-lapse to ease the blow. He didn't know how much later it was that he came to, and saw Dinky Winky Woo directly before him, seated on his haunches, his small forelegs against his breast, his flat head some forty or fifty feet above them.

A sixty-five foot dinosaur, covered with scaly armor! Never had Hubert's six foot two frame seemed so small.

Al was placidly chewing.

Dinky Winky Woo evidently recognized Al for an old friend, and ignored him. But he was cautiously studying Hubert. The small eyes under their horny lids were peering down intently. It made Hubert awfully nervous.

His throat was dry, but somehow he managed to ask Al, "Wh-where did Uncle Cyril ever find the thing?"

"Don't rightly know. He went huntin' in the hills one time, and that air critter followed him home."

Hubert was appalled. "Didn't Uncle Cyril try to get rid of him?"

*Thukk!*

"Couldn't, not hardly," Al said. "Couldn't jes' up and give the critter away, seems as though. Ain't hardly nobuddy'd want him."

"True," Hubert agreed thoughtfully.

"Besides," Al said, "yore uncle got fond of him, kind of. Got mighty takin' ways about him, Dinky Winky Woo has."

It hardly seemed possible, Hubert thought, looking at the huge body covered with its scaly, almost-metallic armor. There seemed little that was lovable about the flat, reptilian head. Maybe it was Dinky Winky Woo's personality that no one could resist?

As if the huge dinosaur had read his mind, it reached down and lifted Hubert aloft in its talon-like forepaws.

Hubert screamed piercingly. "Al! My God, Al!"

He looked down, his heart pounding. Al was only a dot on the landscape, forty or fifty feet below. Hubert closed his eyes.

"Al, tell him to set me down!" Hubert cried. "Ask him in a nice way, please to set me down!"

Al was calling something, but Hubert couldn't hear.

Hubert forced himself to keep his appalled gaze on Dinky Winky Woo's face. If you could call that a face. The creature's neck bent until the head was directly before, and on a level with, Hubert's own. Hubert realized, with dull surprise, that Dinky Winky Woo's paw was holding him very carefully.

A HUGE pink tongue swept out and gently licked Hubert with a soft *slup-slupping* sound. It was a lingering caress, almost excessively damp. With inexpressible tenderness, Dinky Winky Woo then bent and set Hubert gently back on his feet. Hubert reeled unsteadily. The dinosaur's little eyes were gleaming with love-light.

Hubert turned to find Al staring at him respectfully. "Wal, if that wan't purty! If that wan't the purtiest thing I ever seen! Why, shecks, he *likes* ya!"

"D-d-does he?" Hubert quavered.

"I h'ain't never seed Dinky take so to a stranger afore!" Al breathed.

Hubert made a modest gesture with his hand. Somehow, it was pretty flattering to have a dinosaur like you practically at first glance. It made you

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humble. It made you act pretty modest, lest people accuse you of getting a big head.

Hubert looked up at Dinky. There was a funny, warm glow about his heart. Strange! More, he had a temptation to show off in front of Al. Maybe—no, that was too much to hope. Still—he'd try, darned if he wouldn't!

"Dinky!" Hubert called breathlessly. "Lift me up again!"

Eagerly the huge pre-historic mammal bent, and lifted Hubert up, while Al's jaw hung slackly. Hubert patted Dinky's flat head. "Nice boy! Good ole boy! Now put me down again."

Obediently, Dinky carefully set Hubert back on his feet. But not before he'd caressed Hubert again. *Slup, slup!*

Hubert found that he didn't mind it! He—he even *liked* it! My God, was he going mad?

The awe and respect in Al's eyes were almost overwhelming.

Again Hubert was forced to make a modest gesture of disclaimer. "It's nothing, really. Just have a way with animals, I guess."

But Al was not to be dispossessed of his hero-worship. "Why, shecks, I h'ain't never seed the like of that afore! That air critter onderstands every word you say to h'it!"

*Thukk!*

THE strange wooing went on for days. Dinky Winky Woo grew more and more attached to Hubert. And vice-versa. One thing, though. Hubert had to break Dinky of the habit of wagging his tail whenever he saw his new master. The last time he'd done it, three ancient oaks had been uprooted.

"What I can't understand," Hubert said once to Al, "is how come news of Uncle Cyril's pet never got out and swept the country."

"Oh, ev'body here knew about h'it," Al admitted, "but half of them wouldn't believe their eyes. The Chamber of Commerce shut up the other half. Seems they were afraid no one would ever come within miles of Laughing Gap, did they know there was a dinosaur wanderin' around."

Hubert nodded thoughtfully. He broached a subject that had been growing on him for days. "Al, I'm going to take Dinky back to my home town."

Crystal had seemed to think him a coward. But if she saw him fearlessly helling around with a dinosaur—!

The thing presented difficulties, as Hubert was well aware. But not insurmountable difficulties, even though Al said now, aghast, "Shecks, you can't transport that air critter nowheres. H'ain't no freight car big enough, not nearly."

"I've thought of that," Hubert admitted, "and the answer is a trailer. An open stake-sided trailer that I can hitch onto the back of my car. It will have to be specially built, of course."

And even though Al shook his head dubiously, Hubert placed the order for the trailer. In time it was delivered, and one bright summer morning he prepared to leave.

Dinky Winky Woo behaved beautifully. He didn't seem to care where he went, or how, just so long as he could be with Hubert. It required no persuasion to get him up the ramp and into the stake-bodied trailer. At Hubert's command, Dinky sank back on his vast haunches.

But the effect was bad.

Al rubbed his chin. "Can't just go bustin' around the country like that. Lookit the way Dinky's head sticks up forty feet! Shecks, peepul will be awful curious."

Hubert's heart sank. He guessed Al was right. In the end, though, Hubert

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had a brilliant idea. Four tarpaulins, used to cover haystacks with, were stitched together. The whole thing was artfully draped over Dinky's patient head and body.

"There!" Hubert said in triumph. "Who'd know but what that was a steam shovel I was transporting!"

It was a wrench, leaving Al, but, "We'll be back," Hubert promised.

From the porch, Al waved faithfully until they were out of sight.

HUBERT and Dinky were well into Minnesota before they met Roxie. Things had gone well. Twice they'd stopped in thickly wooded sections to let Dinky Winky Woo eat his fill. The dinosaur wasn't a bit homesick, and seemed to be enjoying the ride.

Then, rounding a curve, Hubert saw a girl sitting on an up-ended suitcase by the side of the road. There were two square tin boxes, flanking her on either side, and her shoulders drooped in an attitude of dejection.

Hubert braked his equipage. "Want a ride?"

He saw that she was young, with deep blue eyes and rusty-red hair. She wasn't very tall but she was neatly put together. And the legs in their fishnet stockings were something to look at twice. Not that Hubert did. Still, they registered.

At his timid query, she looked up. "That's the silliest question I've heard in weeks." She picked up her things and came over to the door of the car. She was much prettier when she was nearer.

"I hope," she said, "that you're not the type of gentleman to go getting any bright ideas?"

Hubert didn't know quite what she meant. "Who, me? Why, I—"

"Don't then. Just don't, or you'll get a poke in the nose, etc."

What a curious conversationalist she was, Hubert thought as she climbed in. Her words sounded angry, but she looked quite calm and collected. She watched him rather warily at first, he noticed, but she soon warmed up and grew talkative.

Her name, it appeared, was Roxie Biloxi, and she was a lady snake charmer stranded from a traveling carnival. The manager, it seemed, had got "bright ideas" and Roxie had had to "hang one on him." Then she "blew."

It was all just so much gibberish to Hubert. He decided to take one thing at a time. "Roxie Biloxi? An unusual name."

"Kind of musical, huh?" Roxie said. "I made it up for professional use. I was christened Rose Ann McGinnis."

"Oh. And those tin boxes?" He pointed to the two squares of tin that Roxie had set on the floor in front of her. "What's in them?"

"My snakes. Want to see them?"

"No. No, thanks," Hubert said hurriedly.

"They aren't much," Roxie admitted. "A couple Indian cobras, etc. They're all more or less poisonous."

Hubert wondered if Dinky Winky Woo would impress her. She seemed almost blase about everything else. But he decided he'd better not mention Dinky. Dinky was so much larger than a snake—even a poisonous one.

He'd no sooner made this decision than he felt something wet on the back of his neck. *Slup, slup!*

AND then he felt Roxie, beside him, grow tense. Dinky must have kissed her, too!

Before she could nerve herself to turn around, though, Dinky withdrew under his tarpaulin.

"What in the name of — what *was*

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that?" Roxie whispered. "Something licked the back of my neck."

Hubert held up his hand nervously. "Rain, maybe?"

"It didn't feel like it." She looked at Hubert suspiciously. "Well—" She shrugged and let it go.

In the rear view mirror, Hubert saw Dinky's head come out from under the tarpaulin, and his eyes regard them roguishly. In horror, Hubert saw Dinky's forepaw come out and pet Roxie's shoulder!

Roxie turned on Hubert, and looked him straight in the eye. "Stop the car! This instant!"

"But I—"

"When I get through with you, you —"

Hubert braked the car. "Look, I swear I didn't do that. It was Dinky Winky Woo. I saw him in the mirror."

Roxie was still suspicious. "Who is Dinky Winky Woo?"

It had to come out. There was no help for it. Hubert called, "Dinky! Stick your head out, so Roxie can see you."

Dinky obliged coyly.

Roxie took one look, and shut her eyes. "I didn't see that thing? And if I did, what was it?"

"A dinosaur."

Her eyes opened again. They were very blue, Hubert noted, and the black lashes were twice as long as most. She said, "A dinosaur—like in a museum?"

"Yes," Hubert said. "Only Dinky isn't in any museum. He's right here."

"So it would appear," Roxie moaned. "Goodbye now. Thanks for the ride."

But Hubert caught her arm as she would have got out of the car. "Don't be alarmed. Dinky likes you, or he wouldn't have kissed the back of your neck."

"Is that so?" Roxie was faintly interested, and hope fluttered again in Hubert's chest. He didn't know why the prospect of losing Roxie should seem so alarming. But it did. He had to make her stay. And to whet her interest he climbed out of the car and let Dinky out of the trailer. Fortunately, they were in a deserted section of the country.

"Watch!" Hubert said importantly. And he put Dinky through his paces. He had Dinky lift him, and set him down again. He had Dinky sit up and beg. Through the whole gamut of tricks, Hubert put him. It was really worth seeing, and Roxie was visibly impressed.

"I wonder—" she began.

"Yes?" Hubert said eagerly.

"Do you suppose Dinky Winky Woo is housebroken?"

Hubert recoiled. Women had such practical minds. "What a thought!" he whispered.

ROXIE giggled. "Even if he is, you're going to look pretty silly leading him around on a leash, don't you think?"

The ice was thoroughly broken. As they rode on eastward, Roxie was looking at Hubert with new respect.

"You know," she said, "not many men would let a dinosaur toss them around like that. You must be awfully brave."

Hubert felt his chest expanding. Before he knew it, he was telling Roxie the whole story—all about Crystal and Slick, and how he hoped to impress Crystal with his courage by openly leading Dinky Winky Woo about the city.

When he finished, he looked at Roxie for approval. But she was looking—well, Hubert could almost have sworn that was disappointment on her face! Odd.

She said slowly, "This Crystal, now. You thought it was pretty strange

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yourself, you said, that you weren't moved to wipe up the floor with Slick Mobridge that time?"

Hubert nodded.

Roxie sat up straighter. "And didn't that suggest something to you? Something about you and Crystal?"

Hubert pondered long. "No, I can't say that it did."

Roxie sank back. "You're a nice boy, Hubert, but you're not very bright. I think I'll have to keep an eye on you."

Hubert didn't understand her. But he thought it would be nice.

THE most inexplicable event of all though, to Hubert, occurred after they'd crossed the Wisconsin state line. Something happened to make him behave in a totally uncharacteristic fashion. And it puzzled him for days.

Dinky Winky Woo breakfasted early on a farmer's haystack, and Hubert left a roll of bills to solace the absent farmer. Then, feeling the pangs of hunger themselves, he and Roxie stopped in at a roadside shack for coffee and doughnuts.

They were dunking their second doughnuts when a truck-driver came in. A very large, burly truck-driver, who proceeded to have what Roxie called "bright ideas".

"Hello, toots, you can call me Lefty,'" he said graciously. And he threw Roxie what he no doubt considered a ravishing smile, charged with personality.

Roxie elevated her pert nose, and glared at him, speechless with anger.

"Aw, come on—" the truck-driver began.

Hubert leaned over to look past Roxie at Lefty. "I don't think she wants to know you," he observed mildly.

"That's okay," Lefty grinned. "I like 'em reluctant."

And he tried to slip an arm around Roxie. She jumped up and so did Hubert. There was a peculiar red haze before Hubert's eyes. Almost automatically his hand reached out, grabbed Lefty by the collar, hauled him backward off the stool.

The trucker started a wild haymaker from the knees. Hubert side-stepped easily, and stuck an almost negligent left into the whiskered face. Lefty reeled and would have fallen but for Hubert's grip on his collar.

Hubert wheeled the trucker around, and planted a foot that impelled the would-be Lothario through the door and sprawling into the graveled drive. Lefty picked himself up, and grabbed a monkey wrench from the cab of his truck. Hubert started for him again, but before they could meet there came an angry, snarling growl, like the rumble of thunder.

Dinky Winky Woo was trying to climb out of the trailer. He was regarding Lefty with active dislike. Lefty had looked up at the growl, but it must have taken a minute for his eyes to focus. He dropped the wrench and jumped back.

"*Eee-yee-yee-yee!*" he gibbered. He made the truck in one heroic leap, and fled.

Hubert passed a hand over his eyes. The red haze was fading, but his heart was still banging against his ribs angrily.

"Good ole boy!" he commended Dinky, who was still glaring hotly after Lefty's rapidly vanishing truck. "Get back under the covers, Dinky."

When the dinosaur obeyed, Hubert went back to Roxie, who had slumped onto a stool and was staring at him almost vacantly.

"You all right?" Hubert said, in a clipped voice that was new to him. "He didn't hurt you?"

"Yes. No. I mean, I'm okay," Roxie faltered. Then, "Why, Hubert!"

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SHE looked dazed, and after a minute, Hubert thought he knew why. What an exhibition he'd made of himself before a lady! "I'm sorry I lost my temper," he apologized.

Roxie said, "You lost your temper—because Lefty got funny with me?"

"Yes." Hubert felt himself going red with shame.

Roxie looked thoughtful. "And does that suggest anything to you?" she said tersely.

Hubert pondered again. "Why, no, I can't say that it does."

Hubert couldn't understand what happened next. Roxie was glaring at him. She seemed violently angry with him, though he couldn't see why she should be.

"Oh, sometimes you can be so dumb I could crown you!" she said angrily.

Hubert looked bewildered. "Why, what's the mat—"

"Oh, shut up!" Roxie glared at him. "You give me a pain!"

She rushed past him, and out to the car. Hubert shook his head. Women were kind of peculiar, he guessed.

THE rest of the journey was made without mishap. When they reached his home-town, Hubert said, "Where are you going to stay, Roxie?"

She looked away from him. "On the nearest park bench, with *my* bankroll."

Hubert was amazed. "You can't do that! Why—why come and stay at my apartment." He thought a moment, and added delicately, "You'll be perfectly safe."

"Oh, I daresay!" Roxie snapped frigidly.

"But—but I mean you really will!" Hubert said earnestly.

"Oh, shut *up!*" Roxie said.

Now what had he done, for Pete's sake? Hubert couldn't understand her at all. Everything he said seemed to make her mad. And yet she didn't seem to have a bad disposition ordinarily.

He drove directly to his apartment house.

"I suppose you're going to tear right off to see this whirlwind, Crystal?" Roxie said, acidly.

"Why, no. Not this minute."

"What self-control the man has!" Roxie said to the air.

It was very perplexing. Roxie sounded as if she didn't like Crystal. But how could that be, Hubert wondered, when she didn't even know Crystal? And even if she didn't like Crystal, why should it make her mad at *him?*

Hubert shook his head, and gave up.

THERE was a vacant lot next to the apartment building. Hubert parked the trailer in it. Dinky would have to stay in the trailer, of course, but when it got dark Hubert could let him out to relieve his cramped muscles. Luckily, Hubert's apartment was on the fifth floor, and Dinky could stick his head in a window, from time to time, to reassure himself of his master's presence.

Roxie and Hubert scrambled together a supper of sorts. Hubert opened his newspaper at the table, and looked across at Roxie. It was a very domestic scene. "Almost," Hubert mused aloud, "as if we were married."

Roxie sniffed. "You wouldn't be reading a newspaper if we were married."

"What would I be doing?"

"He wants to know, what would he be doing?" Roxie said ironically to the ceiling. She glared at Hubert.

Dinky Winky Woo chose that moment to stick his head in the open window. He beamed at them encouragingly with what Hubert could only term approbation in his eyes.

To escape the two disconcerting pairs of eyes, Hubert opened his paper again. Almost immediately it fell from his

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palsied hand, and the expression on his face was so alarming that Roxie ran around the table.

"What is it?" she cried.

Hubert pointed wordlessly to the picture and write-up. Crystal and Slick Mobridge were shown together, affectionately cheek to cheek, and the headline said:

SOCIETY AND CAFE SOCIETY MERGER

*"Miss Crystal Delorme of Sutton Terrace and Mr. Edward (Slick) Mobridge, owner of the* Gay Cabana, *to be married tomorrow morning at eleven o'clock, in a simple civil ceremony at the City Hall. Their attendants . . . "*

Roxie went straight to the point. "Well, what are you going to do about it? You love her, don't you?"

"I—I guess so."

"You *guess* so!" Roxie snapped. She was very pale.

"Well, then, I do!" Hubert said. He stood up. "'I'll stop it, somehow. But —how?"

He looked at Roxie helplessly. She bit her lip, and turned away.

Hubert cried, "Dinky Winky Woo! I'll take him down to the City Hall tomorrow. And when Crystal sees us—"

Roxie looked at him. She was smiling, and her eyes were very bright. "I knew you'd think of something! Just get Dinky Winky Woo down there, and the rest will take care of itself. I'm sure it will."

"You'll come with me, won't you, just to see that everything goes along all right?" Hubert asked anxiously.

He thought at first Roxie was going to say no, but she finally shrugged wearily. "Okay. What difference does it make?"

Before Hubert could ask her what she meant by that, she left the room. Dinky was still looking in the window. His face seemed puzzled. Hubert went over and patted the scaly head affectionately.

"I can count on you, can't I, Dinky ole boy? You'll do your best tomorrow, won't you?"

*Slup, slup!*

THEY still talk of that next morning in Crescent City. As well they might.

Hubert bought yards and yards of red ribbon to tie on Dinky for a leash. Dinky was obviously proud of it.

"It brightens him up some, don't you think?" Hubert asked Roxie anxiously, while Dinky preened himself.

Roxie was dubious. "It doesn't seem to make him any prettier, though."

Hubert could afford to ignore that. If Roxie wanted something pretty, let her get a Peke.

They started out, at long last. Almost immediately, the streets began to clear as if by magic. People took one aghast look, and started running and screaming simultaneously. Traffic came to a standstill, then speeded up alarmingly. In the opposite direction.

Passing the window of a department store, Dinky caught a faint glimpse of his reflection. Evidently anxious for a closer view of the red ribbon, he put his foot through the plate glass window in his eagerness. Appalled at this, he sat down apologetically. Unfortunately he didn't look where he was sitting, so he flattened a sedan parked at the curb.

"It really wasn't his fault," Hubert said defensively.

"Did I say it was?" Roxie replied. "What a place to leave an automobile!"

In getting Dinky off the sedan, his neck became entangled with some telephone wires. He jerked, and two or three poles snapped off at the base like matchsticks. Dinky didn't mind that Hubert and Roxie couldn't get the wires

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off him. He just dragged the whole works after him.

By the time they reached the City Hall, they looked a reckless, dissolute crew. Hubert was sweating mightily, Dinky was clutching the red ribbon which had come off, and Roxie had lost her hat in the confusion.

They halted on the steps of the municipal building, arrested by hoarse shouts from a distance. There seemed to be a mob approaching. There was. All the streets converging on the City Hall were black with people, brandishing clubs.

"It's going to be a big wedding," Hubert observed. "I didn't think Crystal knew so many people."

"Maybe she's popular," Roxie said. "But why the clubs?"

They discovered their mistake, almost at once. The mob wasn't coming to see Crystal married. It had come for *them*. Back of them, the City Hall windows were crawling with agitated faces. Just as the leader of the mob advanced to the foot of the steps, a limousine drove up and Crystal and Slick got out. They stared at the couple on the steps.

"Hubert!" Crystal cried, and waved her bouquet of orchids.

HUBERT waved back. He had just a passing glimpse of Slick's mouth hanging open. It gave the night-club owner a vacant look oddly at variance with his usual suave sophistication.

"There he is!" cried the mob leader, pointing to Hubert. "And look at that damn What's-it he has with him, will you! Come on! Hold your clubs ready!"

Roxie screamed, "They're after Dinky Winky Woo!"

Hubert yelled at the mob. "What are you going to do? Dinky won't hurt you."

"We're going to kill that varmint!" someone shouted.

Dinky, in alarm, stood up on his hind legs. Slick Mobridge yelled and turned to run, abandoning Crystal. The mob shrieked and pressed backward, then surged forward again. Slick was carried forward unwillingly on the tide.

"Try to club the varmint's head!" the mob leader cried, as they started up the steps.

Roxie ran over. She was scared. Hubert held her close to him. And even in the excitement he noted how nice it felt to hold her.

Dinky was making mewling sounds of fear, and throwing glances of helpless appeal at Hubert. It did something to Hubert. Never before had anyone helpless depended on him for aid. He wasn't going to stand by, and see Roxie mauled by a mob. No, nor see his pet clubbed to death, either! He moved down the steps to where there was a landing. His face was grim. His fists clenched.

"Don't come another step!" he warned the leaders.

The mob hesitated. Then some, braver than the rest, cried, "Don't let him bluff us. Come on!"

Hubert tore off his coat. He said grimly, "Come one at a time, or in pairs. Come on, damn you!" His face was white, his jaw set. He looked very alone, there on the platform defying the mob, with only Roxie and the cowering Dinky at his back.

It made a picture that must have appealed to some of the braver hearts in the mob. Someone cried, "The guy's got nerve!"

And someone else yelled, "The animal, whatever it is, isn't charging us. It looks—scared."

While they hesitated, someone gave the leader a rifle. He looked at it, undecided. Slick Mobridge pushed his way

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forward importantly. He evidently saw a chance for a grandstand play, now that Dinky seemed harmless enough.

"Shoot, man!" Slick snapped. "What are you waiting for? Here, give it to me."

He grasped it from the leader's hand, and started to put it to his shoulder. Hubert acted quickly. He dived downward on top of Slick, grabbed the rifle, twisted it from Slick's grasp. Slick turned on him, his face twisting with rage.

He started for Hubert. Roxie ran down, but Slick pushed her aside so violently that she fell and Hubert saw red.

SLICK managed to land two jabs on Hubert's face. One cut a gash at the corner of Hubert's mouth. The other made his nose bleed. Slick landed one more punch before Hubert took his measure, and clipped him on the button. Slick's feet left the ground. He plunged backward into the front ranks of the mob, out cold.

"You all right, Rox?" Hubert yelled. He dashed the blood from his mouth with the back of his hand. He was grinning.

"I'm fine! I'm marvelous!" Roxie screamed. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkling as she looked at Hubert. She was wearing an almost goofy smile.

Hubert ran up the steps. "Lift me up, Dinky!" he shouted, loud enough for everyone to hear. There were gasps from the mob as Dinky bent and lifted Hubert gently aloft.

Hubert shouted down, "See? He obeys me without question. He won't harm anyone unless I order him to."

The mob wavered, then cheered.

"Let us go in peace," Hubert cried, pressing his advantage, "and I promise to take Dinky back where he came from. What's more, I'll pay for any damage he's done."

The mob cheered again, lustily now. Toward the back, some of the members began to disperse. Hubert's heart stopped pounding. He petted Dinky's head. Dinky was trembling at his narrow escape.

"Poor old boy," Hubert said. "As if I'd let anyone hurt you. You can let me down now, Dinky. We're safe."

Dinky held Hubert close against his chest for a minute gratefully, then set him on his feet.

Crystal, who'd been bending over Slick, left him now and ran up the stairs to Hubert. Roxie turned silently away.

"Oh, Hubert!" Crystal cried. "You were wonderful!"

She threw her arms around his neck. Hubert waited a minute. He felt nothing—nothing at all. Gently he released Crystal's arms. "I'm sorry, Crystal."

She looked at him in amazement. "But you don't understand! I'm through with Slick. Didn't you see him try to bolt and leave me in the path of that—that—" She looked at Dinky with revulsion.

Hubert pushed her away. He saw Roxie going down the steps, her shoulders sagging.

"Oh, Roxie!" He started running after her. Crystal stared after him, then tossed her head and strode angrily away. "Roxie!" Hubert cried.

He caught up with her, grabbed her by the shoulders, turned her around.

"Goodbye, Hubert," Roxie said. She was crying. "I guess everything is okay for you now with Crystal. I'm g-g-lad."

She didn't look it, with tears pouring down her face.

HUBERT cried, "But I don't love Crystal! I see now what you meant—why I wouldn't fight for her.

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But you—" he stuttered incoherently. "If anybody tried—Roxie, marry me! Now! And then you and Dinky and I can go back to South Dakota."

Roxie looked up at him. "And suppose I say no?"

"Then," Hubert said grimly, "I'll marry you anyway, if I have to knock you for a loop first."

"Why, Hubert!" Roxie cried. "Why, Hubert!" She was smiling through her tears. "It sounds *wonderful!*"

And she lifted her face for his kiss. *Slup, slup!*

Roxie and Hubert, half-drowned, looked up. But it was only Dinky Winky Woo bestowing his blessing impartially on both of them.

# VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

## Brewster

**The science of optics owes much to this man's genius. He was also the inventor of the clever kaleidoscope.**

DAVID BREWSTER, an eminent Scotch physicist, was born at Jedburgh, Scotland, in 1781. He was educated for the Church, but being more attracted to science than theology, he became in 1808 the editor of the Edinburgh Encyclopedia, to which he also made extensive contributions.

Previous to this he had entered deeply on the study of optics, with which his name is now enduringly associated. He was the inventor of the kaleidoscope, and published a book on it. Although this device is but a scientific toy, its ability to produce an infinite number of symmetrical figures has been extensively taken advantage of to secure suitable and attractive designs and patterns for carpets, wall papers and other fabrics.

The stereoscope is also largely his invention, the honor being shared with Wheatstone, though the divided lenses and their arrangement are due entirely to Brewster.

His scientific work brought him many well-deserved honors. In 1815 he won the Copley medal for optical investigations, and in the following year he received half the prize bestowed by the French Institute, in recognition of important discoveries made in physics during the two preceding years. In 1819 he received the Rumford gold and silver medals, for his discoveries connected with the polarization of light. He was knighted in 1831. In 1849, on the death of Berzelius, he was elected one of the eight foreign associates of the French Institute. He was also a member of the scientific Academies of St. Petersburg, Berlin, Copenhagen and Stockholm, and an associate of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States. He presided over the British Association and in 1851 over the Peace Congress held in London. In 1859 he was chosen vice chancellor of the University of Edinburgh.

He was a voluminous writer. His principal work is his *Life of Newton,* first published in 1828 and issued in a totally new and greatly enlarged form in 1855. Among his other works are his interesting *Letters on Natural Magic,* addressed to Sir Walter Scott; *More Worlds Than One;* his treatises in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on electricity, magnetism, optics, the stereoscope, etc.

The principle on which the stereoscope operates may be easily understood by looking at any solid object with one eye closed. It then gives merely the impression of a flat picture on a flat background. But when viewed with both eyes its three-dimensional quality is at once apparent. The reason is simple. The two eyes being separated horizontally by a space of several inches, we see with the right eye more of the right-hand side of a body under inspection than the left eye does, and the latter sees more of its left-hand side than does the right eye. The two, operating together, produce the effect in the mind of a composite picture, in which we see around the corner—so to speak—on both sides of the object, with the result that it stands out in relief from its background.

The Brewster stereoscope employs two identical pictures of the object to be viewed. In front of them, on a sliding frame properly shielded, is set the two halves of a double convex lens, with their thin edges adjacent. Through this eyepiece the observer looks, and when their position is adjusted to the proper focus for the individual, the two pictures blend perfectly into one, and the effect of relief obtained naturally by the eye is now inten-

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sified, so that even distant objects in them, which the eye alone would hardly have the power to draw out of the background, are brought strongly into relief.

The most important subjects of Brewster's enquiries are enumerated by J. D. Forbes under the following five heads: (1) The laws of polarization by reflection and refraction, and other quantitative laws of phenomena; (2) the discovery of the polarizing structure induced by heat and pressure; (3) the discovery of crystals with two axes of double refraction, and many of the laws of their phenomena, including the connection of optical structure and crystalline forms; (4) the laws of metallic reflection; (5) experiments on the absorption of light. In this investigation the prime importance belongs to the discovery of the connection between the refractive index and the polarizing angle, of biaxial crystals and of the production of double refraction by irregular heating.

# Ampère

## He had much to say about the theory of electro-dynamics

ANDRÉ Marie Ampère, the distinguished French physicist, mathematician, and naturalist, was born at Lyons, France, on January 22, 1775, during the distressing times of the French Revolution. In 1793 his father was executed under the guillotine for political reasons, leaving a deep and melancholy impression on Ampère who was then only eighteen.

He sought solace and forgetfulness in the study of nature and the Latin poets. Having received a good education, and being forced to support himself, he decided to obtain work as a tutor. From about 1796 he gave private lessons at Lyons in mathematics, chemistry and languages; and in 1801 he became professor of physics and chemistry at the central school at Bourg, near Lyons. His wife died in 1804 and he never fully recovered from the blow. In 1809 he became professor of mathematics at the École Polytechnique in Paris. Here he continued his scientific studies and researches with unabated diligence. Later he took the chair of experimental physics in the College de France, a position which he retained during the balance of his life. In 1814 he was elected a member of the Academy of Science.

Science is largely indebted to Ampère for his clear exposition of the theory of electrodynamics and his original views and demonstration of the identity of the phenomena of electricity and magnetism. On September 11, 1820, he heard of H. C. Oersted's discovery that a magnetic needle is acted on by a voltaic current. On the 18th of the same month he presented a paper to the Academy containing a far more complete exposition of that and kindred phenomena. The whole field thus opened up he explored with great care and thus developed a mathematical theory which not only explained the electro-magnetic phenomena, but also predicted many new ones.

While Ampère's explanation of magnetism, which was that "an electrical current is present in each molecule of a magnetized body, and flows in a fixed path," is not accepted at the present time, no other explanation has since been advanced which is considered entirely satisfactory. But it is agreed by scientists, that when the correct explanation is given, it will confirm Ampère's theory of the identity of the two forms of force. There is no doubt that magnetism is a molecular property. If a bar magnet is broken in two, each half becomes at once a complete magnet, with a positive pole at one end and a negative pole at the other. Further, when a bar of soft iron is magnetized and demagnetized, its temperature rises.

Ampère was also the inventor of the astatic needle which made possible the modern astatic galvanometer, to detect very weak currents of electricity. He also originated the theory that electrical currents circulate in the earth, traveling in the same direction as the rotational movement, that is west to east, thus causing it to be a gigantic magnet, which, in its turn, would account for the movements of the mariners' compass. He was the first to show that two parrallel conductors carrying currents traveling in the same direction attract each other, while if traveling in opposite directions they repel each other.

In recognition of the great value of his studies in the electrical field, his name, by international agreement, has been adopted to designate the unit of strength or intensity of an electrical current; that is, the quantity of electricity which passes the cross-section of a conductor in one second of time. It is the current which flows through a conductor whose resistance is one ohm, and between the two ends of which the unit difference of potentials, one volt is maintained.

Ampère's scientific memoirs may be found in the *Annales de Physique et de Chimie.* Later in life he prepared a remarkable *Essai sur la philosophie des sciences,* and wrote many scientific papers, including two on the integration of partial differential equations.

Ampère died on June 10, 1836, at the age of 61. He was greatly mourned by friends and scientists alike. A eulogy by Arago, delivered shortly after his death, which contains an account of his life, stressing the great amiability and simplicity of his character, will be found translated into English in the annual report, the *Journal et correspondance,* of the Smithsonian Institution for 1872.

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# FAIRY

It's easy to find a tenant for property these days. But if the house proves to be already occupied, trouble can result



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# TALE

by

TARLETON FISKE

"THERE is fairies in the bottom of my garden," said the guy.

"The hell you say!" yelled Tim Booker.

"No. I don't say 'the hell.' I alla time say there is fairies in the bottom of my garden."

Tim Booker blew up completely and almost dropped the telephone from his hand.

This was the last straw. For five years Booker had been sitting at the phone in his rental agency office, listening to insults from tenants. That was his job at the agency—to take insults, note them down, and refer them to the boss. His not to reason why, his but to listen and lie.

During these five years, Tim Booker prided himself that he had heard everything. He knew the story of leaky plumbing by heart. The tales of noisy



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radiators, no heat, dripping faucets and loud neighbors were old stuff to Mr. Booker. He could handle anything from a squawk about the rent ceiling to a plea for redecorating a bathroom.

But now his nerves gave way. When the loud voice over the telephone said, "There is fairies in the bottom of my garden," Tim Booker just couldn't stand it any longer.

He lost his temper. Somebody was kidding him. Fairies in the bottom of his garden, were there?

"What am I supposed to do about it?" snarled Mr. Booker. "Do you want me to come down and wave a magic wand at them? You're drunk—get off the wire!"

"I'm not drunk," insisted the soft voice at the other end. "I'm Tom Rowland of 711 Honeysuckle Drive. And if you don't come out here right away, I'm gonna tell the Rent Control Board on you."

Tim Booker felt an icy chill take liberties with his spine.

"No," he gasped. "Not that—anything but *that!* I'll be right out, Mr. Rowland."

He hung up, trembling. His natural subservience returned. Through long habit he was once again a servant of the rental agency, and like a good servant he cringed at the very mention of the Rent Control Board.

Even fairy-befuddled drunks were easier to handle. Tim Booker sighed, reached for his hat, and left the office. Shuddering at the vibrating needle on his gas gauge, Mr. Booker swung his car out into the traffic and guided its squeaky chassis towards 711 Honeysuckle Drive and Mr. Thomas Rowland.

711 Honeysuckle Drive proved to be a most imposing mansion set back on a wide, tree-bordered lawn. Spacious grounds stretched out in back, and Thomas Rowland stretched out on the spacious grounds.

At least, he guessed it was Mr. Rowland who lay on the back lawn with a bottle resting against his chin.

As Tim Booker turned in the drive, the recumbent gentleman rolled out of the way and waved his bottle in greeting.

"Welcome to Honeysuckle Drive," he called, wobbling to his feet unsteadily. "Have a drink. "Place's yours. All yours! You're my pal, real life-saver!" He halted and assumed a look of grim belligerency. "Say, who the hell are you?" he sneered.

Tim Booker climbed out of the car. "I'm the man from the agency. I've come to see about those fairies in the bottom of your garden."

Mr. Rowland's sneer deepened.

"Who told you?" he demanded truculently. "Who alla time told you?"

"Why, you did!"

"Oh!" The smile returned to Rowland's flushed face. "Then you're alla time my pal. I remember, now."

Tim Booker sighed. He *had* been right. Little Mr. Rowland was very drunk indeed. And this affair was just another wild goose chase.

MR. ROWLAND floundered around exactly like a wild goose as he led Tim Booker down the path towards the garden back of the house.

There really was a garden—a large and pretty area with trellises and a swing, and a pebbled pathway leading to a rock garden at the rear of the place. Flowers bloomed in luxuriant profusion. Tim Booker noted one incongruity. The grass needed cutting badly.

"Don't you mow your lawn?" he asked. Mr. Rowland swung around and blinked blearily.

"O'Driscoll mowed it. He was alla time mowing it."

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"O'Driscoll? Who's O'Driscoll?"

"Emmett O'Driscoll. He was my gardener. He got drafted last month. Now I alla time got nobody to mow my lawn."

"Too bad."

"He brought the fairies with him, see? They alla time come with his family, he said. And now he's drafted. They took him away and left me with the fairies all alone. Alla time alone."

Mr. Rowland sobbed a little.

"I wish to Gawd the army would alla time draft them, too. What's happening to me shouldn't happen to Hitler!"

He tapped Tim Booker on the chest with a trembling finger.

"You ever see snakes?" he demanded. "Pink elephants?"

"No," Booker admitted.

"Well I have, brother. I alla time see such things. They aren't pretty. But I'd a damned sight well rather see a zoo-full of them than these fairies. Fairies! Gawd—alla time fairies!"

Abruptly he recovered himself and sighed. "You wanna know why I'm drunk?" he asked, sorrowfully. "You wanna know why I'm alla time drunk?"

Mr. Booker didn't want to know, but he couldn't help it, so he nodded weakly.

"All right, if you gotta be nosey," said Rowland, triumphantly. "I'll tell you why I'm alla time drunk. On account of I'm alla time drinking, see?"

This startling explanation would have held Tim Booker for a while, but Mr. Rowland insisted on continuing.

"And why am I alla time drinking? Because I alla time see those blasted fairies. That's why I drink! Jeez, I wish I was drunk now!" exclaimed Mr. Rowland, falling down.

Tim Booker, wondering how he would end this maudlin session and get out of the place, helped little Mr. Rowland to his feet.

"Why don't you go inside and lie down for a while?" he suggested.

"Because I alla time want to show you these fairies first," Rowland muttered. "Then we'll both go inside and lie down."

"Very well," said Tim Booker. "Where are these fairies?"

Mr. Rowland reeled down the pebbled pathway towards the rock garden. He paused before a cluster of rocks, his red-rimmed eyes revolving woozily as he scanned the underbrush.

"Here," he exclaimed. "Here are the little stinkers now!"

Smiling superciliously, Tim Booker joined Mr. Rowland and peered down at the shrubbery.

"I don't see any—" he began.

"Holy jumping smokes!" he yelled, leaping backwards across the path. "What are those?"

"Fairies," chanted Mr. Rowland patiently. "Alla time fairies!"

Fairies, they were.

TIM BOOKER stared down at a cluster of tiny faces, rising impudently from the bushes at his feet. Marvelously, incredibly tiny faces—unmistakably human in features—barely six inches from the ground!

Bright, beady eyes twinkled from shrewd, wrinkled countenances. Tim Booker caught a glimpse of ragged garments clothing arms and legs thin as pretzel sticks. For one unbelievable moment he saw the pattern of a minute hand, no bigger than a single cornflake, as it rested against a leaf.

There was a shrill tinkle of high-pitched laughter, a sudden scurry, and the figures and faces disappeared.

The fairies were no longer "alla time." They were gone.

Tim Booker blinked.

"I—I can't believe it," he whispered.

"Why don't you alla time write to Ripley?" suggested Mr. Rowland, tak-

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ing a hasty swig from his almost empty bottle. "Me, I'm getting out of here."

"What?"

"I'm leaving," said Mr. Rowland, wobbling back up the path. "I'm alla time through with fairies."

"But that means breaking your lease," gasped Tim Booker.

"I don't care if my lease smashes to bits," replied Rowland.

"You can't do such a thing!" Tim Booker shouted, horrified by such blasphemy against all landlords.

"All right, so we'll alla time take it to court. Or the Rent Control Board. You want I should tell those guys about how you have alla time fairies in your garden?"

"No," whispered Booker. "No, we don't want that."

Triumphantly, Mr. Rowland rounded the corner of the house on one leg and disappeared.

Tim Booker climbed wearily into his car and fumbled with keys and clutch.

Suddenly, from the depths of the garden, he heard the sound of shrill, mocking laughter.

He zoomed down the drive in high, but the laughter followed him to the street, and clung to him that night in dreams.

TIM BOOKER would gladly have forgotten about the fairies at 711 Honeysuckle Drive, but Desmond Goudger wouldn't let him.

Desmond Goudger was Tim Booker's Boss—with a capital "B." He was the kind of an employer who will always be thought of with a capital "B"—even though the "B" doesn't necessarily stand for "Boss."

It was his Boss who started all the trouble.

"What's this about 711 Honeysuckle Drive?" he demanded harshly, pausing at Tim Booker's desk the next morning. "You let a tenant go without holding him to the lease?"

"He was drafted," Booker lied, nervously watching the telephone tremble in its cradle as the Boss's voice boomed.

"Well, hurry up and rent that dump," ordered Desmond Goudger. "With the housing shortage, you ought to have a client ready to move in tomorrow."

But Tim Booker didn't have a client the next day, nor the next. He hoped to heaven he never would. Explaining those fairies would cost him his job.

On the third day, the Boss stalked out of his office and chewed his cigar against Tim Booker's ear.

"What's the matter with you, Booker?" he growled. "Haven't you got a sucker for that 711 property yet?"

"I don't think so—you see, that is—"

"Listen, Booker," grunted Desmond Goudger. "I'm going to give you a piece of my mind."

"I don't see how you can spare it," Tim Booker *almost* said. What he really did was cringe and listen. For five minutes, the Boss distributed a portion of his mentality gratis. His conclusion was masterly, but Tim Booker didn't appreciate it.

"You'll damned well have that joint rented by tomorrow," he snapped, "or else."

With a final bite on his frayed cigar, Desmond Goudger strode off.

Tim Booker sat at his desk for a long moment. Twice his hand went out towards the volume of rental applicants. It would be so easy to pick a name from the list and call. He didn't try.

It was no use. He couldn't.

Suddenly Tim Booker straightened up. Resolution kindled, flamed in his eyes.

He got up, grabbed his hat, left the office, climbed into his car, and drove to 711 Honeysuckle Drive. In the grip

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of his determination, all these actions seemed part of a single resolute gesture.

It was not until he was actually walking down the pebbled pathway of that deserted back yard that Tim Booker realized what he was actually going to do.

He, Tim Booker, fully (if sloppily) dressed and in his right (if slightly vacillating) mind—he, Tim Booker, was actually going to talk to the fairies!

Booker glanced nervously over his shoulder. There was nobody around. The garden gleamed in the afternoon sunlight. It looked peaceful, placid. The long, uncut grass at his feet rustled in a gentle breeze.

Everything was the way it should be. Normal. There were no fairies. It was all a mistake. There were no—

*"Ouch! It's stepping on me yez are, gossoon!"*

TIM BOOKER jumped like a kangaroo.

Peering up from between his turned-in toes was an incredible little figure. He drew his shoes back in dismay. The tiny mannikin stared up at him, squinting as though trying to focus his vision on something far distant.

"Och, and it's you again," said the mannikin, petulantly.

"Why not?" Tim Booker recovered a little of his composure. After all, there was nothing to fear from a creature six inches tall. He bent down, crouching on his knees, and scrutinized the tiny being before him.

The fairy was certainly no more than six inches in height, and yet there was nothing dwarfed or misshapen about his perfectly proportioned little b o d y. Tiny, tight brown ringlets covered a head the size of an apricot. A face scarcely bigger than the circumference of a walnut regarded Tim Booker gravely, as Booker gazed in fascination at the truly pipe-stem limbs, covered with minute pinpoint freckles. The fairy, save for a sort of apron around the waist, was naked.

Booker didn't know why the fairy's woolen apron attracted his attention, but there was something familiar about it.

"And what may yez be starin' at with yer saucer eyes?" demanded the fairy, in a shrill, exasperated tone. "If it's the breach I'm after wearin' to cover me nakedness, why then 'tis but an ould sock of Emmett Driscoll's. He knitted it for me, fine gentleman that he was. Sure, and as for the hole in the toe, it's sewed up it is entirely, so the wind doesn't whistle up the small of me back."

Tim Booker remembered the story of the drafted gardener who had been responsible for the presence of the fairies. He began to formulate an argument.

"O'Driscoll was a pretty nice guy, I hear," he observed.

The mannikin nodded. "Sure and he was that. 'Twas O'Driscoll who built us the rock garden. Kind he was, and understandin' of the needs of the wee folk. He chased the accursed dogs and cats away. He was forever seein' to it that we got the dew fresh from the lawn.

"Many's the bit of clothing he's fashioned for us, to ward off the damp. As for Rowland, and may a blight rest forever on his name, he never bothered his head about the garden when Emmett O'Driscoll was here.

"Yes, O'Driscoll served us well—and why shouldn't he, I'm askin'? Have not the wee folk served the O'Driscolls for generations past on the Ould Sod? Sure and I can be after rememberin' Rory O'Driscoll, his grandsire, and a fine strappin' bucko—"

Tim Booker cut through this flood of

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stage-Irish brogue and planted his planned suggestion.

"There's just one thing I don't understand," he said, naively. "Why did you folk desert O'Driscoll? Why didn't you go with him when he was drafted?"

THE fairy laughed, making a sound like a Crackerjack prize whistle.

"Sure, and what would we be doin' in the military, I'm askin'? We'd be forever racin' about at the blast of a bugle . . . sleepin' on a parade ground where there's no dew, and a great lumberin' tank forever about to roll over yez! No, we stay here until O'Driscoll is back from the wars."

Booker took this statement impatiently. Then he hit on another argument.

"But isn't it bad for you to be here all alone? Who'll make your clothes now? What about this Rowland fellow?"

"Och!" The fairy looked doleful for a moment. "Rowland alone is a different matter entirely, that he is! After O'Driscoll left, he took to comin' out into the garden to sleep off his rampages. He trampled down the flowers and murthered them."

"So maybe you'd better leave," Booker suggested.

"Why? It's gone he is now entirely, thanks to yez," chirped the fairy, making a little bow. "We're free to stay here and wait for O'Driscoll to polish off the haythens and come back to us. It's the run of the place we have here now."

"But that's just it," said Tim Booker, in exasperation.

The fairy paid no attention to him whatsoever. He had turned, and was now beckoning in the direction of the shrubbery.

"Come out," he called. "Come out and meet the fine, grand gentleman to whom we are bespoken for his kindness."

With florid gesticulations, he ushered forth five more tiny figures. Bowing and curtseying, the fairies presented their grinning faces to Tim Booker.

"I'm Nubbin," said the first fairy, before introducing his companions. "And this, sir, is Sib."

Sib was quite elderly for a fairy, in Tim Booker's opinion—a little wizened, monkey-like figure with white hair and a wrinkled face the size and texture of a prune.

"And Slip."

Slip, by virtue of a ragged handkerchief cut like a dress, proved to be a lady. Her age was evidently equal to Sib's, and she greeted Tim Booker in a piping squeak. "Sure, it's a plasure to meet up with yer worship, that it is."

Nubbin introduced the others.

"Here's Gandy, sir."

Gandy was a snub-nosed youngster with an impudent smirk. Booker, gazing at him, was reminded of a miniature Mickey Rooney.

"How's tricks?" asked Gandy, in a surprisingly blase voice with but a trace of brogue.

"Yeah. What's buzzin', cousin?" drawled a new voice — if you can imagine a flute drawling.

Tim Booker stared down at a saucy, pert, girlish face. The female fairy had red hair. With a shock, he realized that the obliging Emmett O'Driscoll had give her a pair of improvised slacks to wear.

"This is Dunnie," said Nubbin. "And a wild colleen she is."

The five fairies crowded about Booker's knees, gazing at his face and limbs with open curiosity and whispering behind their petal-like hands.

"You're after fergettin' me," squealed

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a small voice from the bushes. A sixth fairy emerged.

"Oh, Thomakin!" Nubbin exclaimed. "I did forget, truly."

"It's a noble pleasure to be beholdin' yer august and illustrious countenance, that is a fact," said fat little Thomakin. He bustled forward, wearing his bandana handkerchief toga with pompous dignity. He halted at Booker's side and lifted a hand.

TIM BOOKER, with equal gravity, made an attempt to shake hands. He could scarcely feel the tiny paw lost in the immensity of his own great palm.

"We're that grateful to you," said Thomakin, "for providin' us with this great, grand house."

Booker bit his lip.

"I'm glad to hear that." He hesitated, then plunged on. "But that's just what I've come out here to tell you, folks. You can't have this great, grand house."

"What?"

"I'd like you to have it, sure. If it were mine, I'd give it to you. But it isn't mine, don't you see? It's owned by my boss, Desmond Goudger. And I'm going to have to rent it to a new tenant right away. He sent me out here to tell you to vacate the premises."

"Vacate the premises?"

"Get off the property?"

"Leave?"

Tim Booker nodded.

Dunnie faced him, tossing her carrot-curls. "And what if we don't choose to leave?" she asked, mockingly. "What then?"

"Then we'll sue you," said Booker, weakly. He realized how meaningless the threat was as soon as he uttered it.

"Very well," said Gandy, suddenly impudence itself. "Sue and be damned to yez, says I."

"We'll not get off, and that's final," added Dunnie.

It was then that desperate Tim Booker made an unforeseen decision.

He rose to his feet and scowled.

"So you won't get off?" he muttered. "All right, to hell with you! I'll move into this place myself!"

THREE days later, Tim Booker and his wife, Mildred, moved into the house at 711 Honeysuckle Drive.

Tim had no trouble with Mildred when she heard the news. A single mention of that exclusive suburban address more than persuaded her the house must be ideal. Her flying visit was unnecessary — she had scarcely bothered to look at the place. Tim didn't show her the garden and she didn't bother to look for herself. Mildred was too busy making the kind of squeals women always make when confronted with something expensive.

"Oh, it's wonderful, Timmie dear," she gurgled.

Tim Booker didn't even frown at his nickname when it fell from her lips. He was too happy about the whole thing.

Now Desmond Goudger wouldn't be on his neck about renting the place. Mildred wouldn't be nagging at him because she wanted to get a better address and crash society.

Whatever the financial sacrifice, Tim Booker wanted to keep his boss and his wife happy. Only when they were happy were they quiet. Tim Booker needed quiet after his experiences.

He only hoped to heaven, that Mildred wouldn't find out about the fairies in the garden.

During the first three days she was completely engrossed in unpacking household belongings and putting them in the wrong places. On the fourth day she rearranged everything, and on the

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fifth she switched the rearranged furniture around again. Tim Booker buried himself in work at the rental agency and waited.

It wasn't until the weekend that Mildred got out into the back yard at all. Tim Booker reluctantly guided her down the path, keeping a wary eye peeled for sudden movements in the long grass.

Nothing happened. The fairies had discreetly retreated to their rock-garden grottoes.

Emboldened, Booker steered Mildred over to the rock garden itself and beamed as his wife gasped in the sort of ecstasy women can summon up at will.

"How perfectly wonderful, Timmie!" she cooed. "A rock garden! The whole place is charming. We must buy some of those deck chairs and lawn umbrellas at once!"

"Timmie" groaned, but inwardly.

"And you must mow the lawn right away," said Mildred, cocking her head and critically surveying the tall grass. "Then we'll be all set."

"All set for what?"

"It's a surprise," said Mildred, happily. "Now why don't you just run in and get the lawn mower and start cutting the grass right now?"

Tim Booker, who had at least eight good reasons why he didn't want to mow the lawn this particular afternoon, obediently went in and got the lawn mower and started cutting the grass.

Mildred watched him for quite a while. She hummed gaily. Tim sweated and looked for the fairies. Not a one emerged. They were probably hiding from his wife—and in a way, he envied them.

For a brief moment he held a wild hope that perhaps the wee folk had vanished, after all.

That hope was dispelled the following morning, replaced by gloom.

TIM BOOKER, coming out to the back doorstep for the Sunday paper and the cream, found that his milk had curdled.

He said nothing. Later that morning he ran down to the shopping district and bought fresh milk.

But on Monday morning, Mildred secured the milk and opened the bottle at breakfast.

"Timmie, this milk is sour!" she announced.

"Mummph—is it?" Tim Booker played dumb.

"I'll speak to the milkman about it," Mildred announced.

Tim Booker had other ideas. That morning he tiptoed down the path and halted beside the rock garden.

"Hey, there!" he hissed, in a loud stage-whisper. "Hey, you guys!"

Fat little Thomakin peered around a rock.

"Good morning to yez," he said. "And what can we be after doin' for yer honor this morning?"

"You can damned well be after not tampering with my milk," said Tim Booker, tactlessly.

Thomakin frowned.

"Oh, and it's the curdled milk that's bothering yez?" he commented.

"You did do it, didn't you?" Tim Booker accused.

"Of course we did that," answered Thomakin. "And beggin' your pardon, sir, we'll be after doin' it again unless yez heed the warnin'."

"What warning?"

"Don't use the lawn-mower," said the fairy.

"Don't use the lawn-mower?" Tim Booker echoed.

"Absolutely not! The wee folk do detest the livin' presence of iron."

"Oh." Snatches of ancient legend

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returned to Booker. "You don't like iron, do you? I suppose that's the real reason you wouldn't hang around an army camp."

"Correct yez are entirely," said Thomakin. He studied Tim Booker's face, hanging high above him, and a shrewd gleam came into the fairy's pin-point eyes.

"Sure, and it's readin' your mind I am," accused Thomakin. "And you'd best be droppin' such daft notions. If yez think to clear us out of here with iron, then badly mistaken yez are. For we'll curdle your milk and sour your preserves and plague yez in a hundred ways."

"No lawn-mower?" sighed Tim Booker. "I must let the grass run wild?"

"Precisely," answered the fairy.

Booker shrugged and walked back up the path. He didn't say anything to Mildred and hoped she wouldn't bring the subject up.

THAT evening, when he came home from the office, Mildred met him at the door.

"Timmie, dear," she chortled. "It's been *such* a hot day! I do wish you'd sprinkle the lawn before you come into the house."

Tim Booker didn't need any bulletins on the weather. He had spent a sweltering day at work, and what he wanted most right now was a good cold shower for himself.

Instead, he obediently trotted out to sprinkle the lawn. He dragged the hose up from the basement, connected it, and stalked out into the back yard.

Muttering grimly under his breath, he angrily yanked the nozzle of the hose and let the spray fly. He turned the water up full force and spattered the walk, the grass, and then the pebbled pathway.

Just when the hose hit the rock-garden, Tim Booker didn't know.

A startled squeal brought the matter to his attention.

"Oouueee!" piped the voice.

Tim Booker glanced down just in time to see Nubbin run across the pathway, vainly trying to dodge the stream from the hose.

"Turn it off, man!" yelled Nubbin. "It's drenchin' me, yez are!"

For the first time that day, Tim Booker's spirits soared. Deliberately, he played the hose on the spluttering Nubbin. The little fairy was literally swept off his feet by the force of the water.

"So you won't clear out?" grinned Booker. "Well, then, stay here and take it."

Relentlessly, the hose pursued the fleeing Nubbin, hunted him out between the rocks. Tim Booker lost all sense of dignity and decency. He'd show these fairies! It was bad enough to have a wife and a boss to order him around, but when supernatural midges, six inches tall, tried to do the trick—

"What the—?"

Booker glanced down. The water had suddenly ceased to flow from the hose. A few drops dribbled weakly towards the soggy ground.

He turned quickly, and beheld a horrid sight.

Far up the pathway, five tiny forms crouched over the length of rubber hose.

He recognized the five other fairies. They were bending down to the hose, pressing their faces to it, and—

"By heaven!" yelled Tim Booker, "*you've bitten my hose in two!*"

He charged towards the wee folk furiously. They scampered off with derisive hoots and made for the tall grass along the fence.

"Don't you know there's a rubber shortage?" Booker screamed.

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As they reached protection, the rearmost figure turned. It was Gandy. Incredulously, Tim Booker halted and stared as Gandy paused and deliberately thumbed his nose at him.

IT WAS a declaration of war. Tim Booker found that out when he returned home again the following evening.

An angry Mildred met him at the door.

"Somebody's been breaking in and stealing my preserves!" she chattered. "Some vandals are loose in the neighborhood, Timmie. Five jars of my best cranberries are gone. I want you to call the police, immediately."

Tim Booker winced.

"Now wait a minute," he temporized hastily.

"And another thing," Mildred shrilled. "Come here a minute. I want you to take a look at this!"

She marched Booker down the pathway into the back yard.

"Look at these flower beds," she exclaimed. "All trampled down. I tell you, some hooligans have been at work here."

Booker nodded. He knew exactly what she meant, even if she didn't. The war had started.

"You don't seem very upset," Mildred declared. "One would think you would be, after the rascals had nerve enough to write about you."

"Write about me?"

"Look there."

Booker followed his wife's frantic finger as it pointed off in the direction of the board fence. His eyes goggled with disbelief.

There were legends on the fence—legends scrawled in chalk, written in wavering letters close to the ground. Tim Booker read the legends and reddened.

"TIM BOOKER IS A LYING SCOUNDREL"
"BOOKER BEATS HIS WIFE"
"A FOUL MURRAIN ON TIM BOOKER AND ALL HIS ILK"
"THE BACK OF ME HAND TO BOOKER"
"BOOKER HAS HOLES IN HIS SOCKS AND WE CAN SEE THEM"
"BOOKER HAS FLAT FEET"

"What in blazes!" Tim Booker inquired, dancing up and down in the intensity of his emotion. "I haven't got flat feet or holes in my socks! Why it's—"

Mildred giggled.

"I think they're kind of funny," she admitted. "I don't see why you have to fly into a rage over a little thing like that when some thieves have been stealing my preserves and doing something really dreadful."

Booker stared at her, open-mouthed.

"Just get a rag and wipe off those chalk-marks," she commanded. "We don't want them up there tomorrow afternoon."

"Why not?"

"Because of the garden party, stupid."

"Garden party?" groaned Booker.

"Of course. I had meant it as a surprise, but you might as well know now. I've ordered some nice lawn chairs and tables—those lovely metal ones—and some beach umbrellas and games and everything. And there'll be special entertainment and oodles and gobs of people and—"

"Garden party," said Booker, dully.

"And guess what, Timmie? Oh, I'm so excited! I've even persuaded Mr. and Mrs. Goudger to come. And some of their fine society friends! This is our big chance, Timmie. They've already accepted the invitations, and see-

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ing tomorrow is Saturday we'll start out at noon. It's so wonderful!"

"Garden party," whispered Tim Booker. "That's all I needed!"

"I'm going in now and phone the society editor," gushed Mildred, happily.

She skipped up the pathway.

BOOKER stood there with his hands in his pockets. With a hollow groan, he edged over to the rock garden and bent down to whisper.

"Come on out," he pleaded to the empty air. "I want to talk to you."

There was no response.

"You must listen to me," he begged. "Please—please—whatever you do, behave yourselves tomorrow afternoon! I've got to hold this garden party here in the back yard. For heaven's sake, don't start anything!"

No reply came from the empty twilight.

"I'll do anything you want if you'll help me out," Booker panted. "Anything at all. I'll never mow the lawn or sprinkle the grass again. I'll even sell my car so the exhaust fumes won't bother you. I'll—I'll build you a swimming pool, that's what I'll do! Anything, just so you keep out of the way while my guests are here. Please, please cooperate!"

Silence greeted his implorations in the dusk.

It was only as he started back up the path that Tim Booker heard, faintly borne on the twilight air, the faint, mysterious sound of an elfin razzberry.

THE garden party was in full swing. Tables and chairs were set all over the lawn, and colorful, striped awnings had been hoisted, with much painful grunting, by Tim Booker early that morning.

It had taken him until noon to get everything in place, and served as an excuse for not cutting the long grass—though Mildred had given him a good tongue-lashing about that little matter.

Now, sweating freely in his new gabardine sports suit, Tim Booker wandered around and watched Dinah mix drinks at a table set up near the rock-garden. Dinah was very large, very black, and very busy. Mildred had hired her for this affair, and she plunged into her duties with gusto—particularly when it came to mixing drinks with gin in them.

Booker was in the very act of snatching a glass for himself when Mildred came up and yanked him by the arm.

"Come on, Timmie," she commanded gaily, pushing his drink away. "I want you to meet some of the guests."

Under her breath she muttered, "Quit mooching drinks, and for heaven's sake, smile!"

So Tim Booker smiled, as Mildred dragged him around by the elbow and introduced him to his new and aristocratic neighbors — a prime bunch of stinkers, if you asked him.

But nobody asked him.

"Oooh!" squeaked Mildred a moment later. "The Goudgers are arriving!"

Sure enough, Desmond Goudger and his wife, Mimi—a fat, gushing woman with dyed hair—were waddling down the pebbled pathway.

Mr. Goudger came with the inevitable half-chewed cigar working between his lips, and Mrs. Goudger—to Tim Booker's horror—came with her poodle.

It was a horrid little beast, that poodle; round and fat, with frizzy fur that bore signs of artificial curling. Tim Booker was certain Mrs. Goudger had used her own curling iron on its hair.

Introductions were effected, and Mrs. Goudger, simpering, included her poodle. "And this is Fluffy," she said, giggling.

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Tim Booker forced a smile. "Hello, Fluffy," he said, bending down to pet the beast.

Fluffy smiled, wrinkled her nose, and promptly nipped at his ankle.

Booker jumped a foot backwards and sat down, rubbing his leg, as Fluffy yapped hysterically from between Mrs. Goudger's fat calves.

"Playful, isn't she?" grated Tim Booker, with a ghastly leer. He wondered if you could stuff dog-biscuits with dynamite.

Mildred took charge of the situation.

"Get up and stop clowning, Timmie dear," she cooed. "Let's all sit down at a table. Dinah will be here with some drinks directly."

Dinah brought the drinks. Booker could hardly wait to grab his highball. He needed it. While Mr. and Mrs. Goudger sipped, Booker gulped and glanced nervously about the garden. He was looking for the fairies.

They had kept out of sight, so far. Tim Booker hoped to goodness they would continue to do so.

Handling these guests was going to be enough of a problem. Booker saw them sitting at the other tables, drinking and gabbling away. The men, for the most part, seemed a decent sort—confining their activities to drinking. But their wives spent the time criticizing the chairs, the colored awnings, the garden in general, and Mildred's lawn dress.

"NICE place you have here." Goudger thrust his smouldering cigar in Booker's face.

"Oh—yeah, we like it a lot," Booker answered.

"I don't see how you can afford it on your salary," said Desmond Goudger.

Mildred promptly nudged Booker. She wanted him to ask for a raise—he knew it. Tim Booker gulped and dutifully opened his mouth. But Goudger beat him to it.

"No, I don't see how you manage it," he smiled. "And it's going to be harder after I cut your salary next month as I've planned."

Tim Booker gulped again.

"Thought I'd let you know," chuckled Goudger. "We've got to pare down expenses—it's wartime, you understand."

"But, Mr. Goudger—"

*"Eeeeeek!"*

Mimi Goudger made the sound, and a face.

"What is it, darling?" snapped Desmond Goudger.

"Oh—nothing." Mrs. Goudger subsided, squirming uncomfortably.

"About that salary proposition—" said Tim Booker.

*"Eeeeyow!"*

This time Mimi Goudger rose completely from her chair. Her face crimson, she turned to Booker.

"You pinched me!" she accused.

"I—what?" gasped Tim Booker.

"You deliberately pinched me," said Mrs. Goudger. "At first I thought you were only trying to be playful, but this is too much."

"But you must be mistaken," spluttered Booker. "I haven't let my hands leave my lap."

Mildred and Mr. Goudger glared at him. The unhappy Booker cast an imploring glance at his accuser.

"Where did you get pinched?" he inquired.

"What a question to ask a lady!" cried Mrs. Goudger. "But if you must know, it was between the second and third rung of my seat."

Tim Booker cast a quick glance underneath the lady's chair—just in time to see the tiny figure of Nubbin disappear in the rustling grass.

The fairies were at work again!

With a muttered, "Pardon me—ex-

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plain it all later," Tim Booker rose and fled.

It was useless to try and pursue the malicious sprite. He was going for a drink.

At the liquor table, Dinah confronted him with a bewildered flutter of her ham-like hands.

"Lawsy, Mistah Bookah," she said. "You-all is got some mighty peeculyah guestses! Somebody done stole a whole quaht of Irish whiskey from this heah table."

"Oh gosh!" said Tim Booker, snatching the nearest bottle and draining a great gulp of the fiery liquor.

WITH tears in his eyes, he turned to face a strange spectacle. A brawny man in a leopard-skin and a thin, earnest-looking blonde girl in a bedsheet stood at a corner of the lawn.

Mildred was talking to them as Booker stumbled over.

"What kind of a freak show is this?" he demanded.

Mildred flashed him a scornful glance. "Lady-pincher!" she sneered.

"Never mind that—who are these people?"

"Haven't you ever heard of Valour and Chrystis, the celebrated Grecian dancers?" she asked him.

"Is that some kind of a trick question?" Booker shot back. "I assume you are trying to tell me that these two are Valour and Chrystis, the celebrated whatever-they-are. What I want to know is—what are they doing on our lawn?"

"They're going to dance, stupid!" said Mildred. "Greeks always danced on the lawn."

"Not on my lawn they didn't."

"But this is my biggest surprise, Timmie. Mimi Goudger is just crazy about artistic things. She's a patron of the dance."

Tim Booker eyed the muscular man, and his lanky feminine partner with illy-concealed distaste.

"Mean they're going to clodhop around barefoot?"

A blast from the portable phonograph on the back porch settled the question. Dinah had put on a record, and now Mildred stepped to the center of the lawn, clapping her hands. Hastily she introduced the two celebrated devotees of Terpsichore, and the leopard-skinned giant and his agile partner scampered to the center of the greensward.

Helplessly shrugging his shoulders, Tim Booker floundered back to the table and joined the Goudgers.

They were staring at the dance team as they cavorted in a semi-adagio over the lawn.

Absent-mindedly, Desmond Goudger's hand fumbled for his drink and the cigar he had placed on the edge of the table.

Then he poked Tim Booker.

"Did you steal my drink, Booker?" he demanded, in a thunderous whisper.

"Of course not," Booker replied. "I've one of my own here."

But when he looked, his own drink was gone.

"But I did have," he protested. "Just a—"

"Quiet!" snapped Mildred, digging him in the ribs.

Booker cast a quick glance at the grass beyond his feet. Sure enough, bobbing across the lawn, apparently moving of its own volition, was a whiskey-glass. Following it came a tall highball glass. Bringing up the rear like a miniature torch, was Goudger's smudging cigar.

"Those damned fairies," muttered Tim Booker. "They stole the whiskey—they're drunk, that's what they are! Drunk!"

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"Who's drunk?" yelled Desmond Goudger. "I tell you you stole my glass and you accuse me of being drunk. Listen here, Booker—"

Booker didn't listen. He stared in rapt horror at the dancers on the lawn.

Something was going wrong with their routine. Something was going very much wrong. The two dancers were giggling and lifting their feet in awkward haste.

Grass rippled at their feet. Only Booker saw the tiny scurrying figures, hidden by the tall grass-blades, who tickled the bare toes of the pair.

AND as the babble of audience comment rose, only Booker could detect shrill voices, grumbling a few audible words.

"Trampling down the grass . . . it's fixing them we are . . ."

The dancers were rapidly being "fixed."

But the fairies had further plans. Tim Booker suddenly was aware of movement under his very feet. Fluffy, the poodle, was jumping around, uttering hysterical yaps.

Tim Booker shot a glance beneath the table, just in time to see Dunnie, her red hair flaming, rise from the grass and stick Fluffy in an exposed flank with Mrs. Goudger's hat-pin.

Then Dunnie disappeared. So did Fluffy.

With a shrill yelp, the poodle charged across the lawn. Goaded by pain and indignation, Fluffy swept forward, yapping and yipping, straight for the dancers.

Leopard-skin had his partner balanced on his back at the very moment that Fluffy bore down on them.

He began to yap a little himself, and ran around through the grass. Then Fluffy caught up with him and it was all over.

The three disappeared in a whirling ball that struck the ground.

It was a sublime spectacle, but nobody even noticed it.

For at that moment, the gay, striped umbrella awning over the table suddenly collapsed and fell down upon Desmond Goudger, his wife, Mildred, and Tim Booker.

Pandemonium, true to tradition, reigned.

Floundering, gasping, choking beneath the canopy, Tim Booker fought his way free. Twice he was bitten by somebody as he was bending over struggling to his feet. He thought at the time that it was probably Mrs. Goudger, but decided not to mention it.

It was bad enough to face her and her irate husband when the awning was finally thrown aside.

Mildred saved the day. Laughing merrily, she smiled at the bewildered assemblage.

"Just a little accident," she giggled. "Wasn't it, Timmie?"

"Timmie" rubbed his shins and choked up a fearful smile.

"Let's all have a drink," Mildred suggested. "Then I've got something else on the program."

For once she had come out with the right suggestion. Booker noted that she was diplomatically putting a double shot of whiskey in each drink she mixed. Within a few minutes the drinks were distributed and peace was restored.

By this time the liquor was actually taking hold of the crowd. The peaceful mood was usurped by a sudden gaiety. Everybody began laughing too loudly or shrilly.

Mildred, pleased at the change, quickly served another round of refreshments.

Booker drank both drinks and

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sneaked a few more. The warm glow was all he had to fortify him. He kept glancing around, waiting for the next move on the part of his tiny tormentors.

It didn't take a second glance at the nibbled ropes to tell him who was responsible for the fallen awning. He watched the grass, but saw no movements. Maybe they were all so drunk by this time that they'd crawled into the rock-garden to sleep it off. Booker felt lik' crawling in with them.

He didn't have a chance.

Because at that very moment, Mildred announced, "Now everybody's going to play croquet."

SURE enough, Dinah was coming down from the porch with an armful of mallets, balls and wire wickets. She set them up from a hastily-scrutinized map in her hand. Meanwhile Mildred laughingly recruited the men to push tables and chairs out of the way.

"Croquet!" muttered Tim Booker, savagely downing another drink. "That does it!"

Everything got blurry, then. The trouble was, it wouldn't stay that way.

Booker was perfectly conscious when his wife grabbed him by one hand, thrust a croquet mallet into the other, and simpered, "We're playing partners, dear. Against the Goudgers."

"On this lawn?" moaned Booker.

"Must we?" He glanced helplessly about as he saw the other couples gathering. The fairies wouldn't like their lawn trampled down—they wouldn't approve of all these wickets and pegs. And they were liable to do something about it.

"Let's have another drink first," Booker suggested, sparring for time.

"You've had enough," Mildred snapped. "Come on. Grab your mallet and let's go to work—or play."

Then everything got mercifully blurry again for Mr. Booker. He saw his wife and the Goudgers doing things with mallets and large wooden balls that rolled through wire wickets.

But he also saw something else.

The grass at the edge of the lawn was moving. Moving and bending! Bobbing above the tops of the blades he saw heads—small heads that wobbled in drunken rage. Over the click of the mallets and the squeals of the guests, Booker's alcohol-attuned ears heard the high, shrill whispering.

"It's abusin' our lawn they are, with their iron wickets."

"Begorra, and we'd best be after takin' matters in hand."

"Dunnie, dear, and did ye bring the whiskey?"

"Whist! We'd be up and at 'em."

Booker knew he was drunk. He tried to imagine that he had hallucinations, and didn't succeed very well. He knew those fairies! Slip and Sib and Gandy and Dunnie, Thomakin and Nubbin were crouching there in the grass—

"Watch this one now!"

Desmond Goudger's great voice boomed in his ears. The red-faced man mangled a cigar between his molars as he stepped up and swung his mallet.

"I used to be a champion at this sort of thing," he asserted. "I played polo for a while, too."

"Who rode you?" squeaked a voice.

"What's that?" yelled Goudger, glaring at Tim Booker.

But Tim Booker hadn't said a word. The voice came from somewhere behind his knees. He wheeled around, but the fairy was gone.

"Huh!" Goudger grasped his mallet and bent down to hit the ball.

He jumped as if stung.

"What's the matter, dear?" asked

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Mrs. Goudger bewilderedly.

Goudger got redder, but said nothing. He shifted his legs and prepared to take a swing.

"What in perdition?" Goudger straightened up, glowering.

"What is it?" insisted Mimi Goudger.

Goudger looked very embarrassed. "I don't like to say it," he blurted, "but somebody seems to be pulling my socks down on me."

"Don't look at me," said Tim Booker, hastily. "Why should I pull down your socks?"

"To spoil my stroke," Goudger answered.

"I wouldn't spoil your stroke. Go ahead and have it—I hope it's apoplexy."

"What?" roared Goudger.

TIM BOOKER wheeled again. He hadn't said anything. The shrill voice came from his side, on the ground.

"Timmie, that isn't funny," whined Mildred, simpering at Desmond Goudger. "Go ahead, Mr. Goudger."

The boss put his foot on the ball for a tight croquet stance. Then he started to swing.

"Oooooh!" gasped his wife. "Something bit my ankle."

"Mosquitoes," said Tim Booker.

"Nuts!" yelled Desmond Goudger. "You've put me off again."

Desperately, he swung. The wooden ball rolled for the wicket. They stood watching it.

"Perfect," said Mildred.

At the last minute something happened. The ball did not swerve through the thick grass — but suddenly the wicket seemed to jump to one side.

Open-mouthed, they saw the ball continue, while the wicket turned on one end and swung away from its path.

"How in the—"

Goudger's question was never finished. From all around them came a series of simultaneous gasps, oaths, and startled cries.

Tim Booker, through blurry eyes, saw that the rest of his guests were having the same odd difficulties. All over the lawn, wickets were moving and turning. Men and women were pulling up their socks and stockings.

To Booker's horror, a fat man suddenly tripped over a wicket and sprawled on the turf. A moment before there had been no wicket in his path.

"What kind of a circus is this?" Goudger exclaimed. "My drinks are stolen, my wife is pinched, awnings fall down, and now your croquet game goes whacky. Damn it all, I'm not licked yet. I don't know how you're managing to cheat me, Booker, but I'll show you."

He swung at the ball madly. His mallet came down with a sharp click. At the last second it swerved aside and hit Goudger's ankle.

"Ouch!" thundered Desmond Goudger.

From behind him, out of nowhere, a new croquet ball came sailing through the air. As Booker watched, it rose and smacked Goudger smartly on the back of the head.

"Ooooof!" Goudger gasped.

Booker stared at Gandy in the grass behind. He had thrown the croquet ball.

He was still staring as Desmond Goudger, bellowing like a bull, charged down on him.

"Curse you, Booker!" yelled the baffled man. "You threw that ball at me."

"I saw him, too!" added Mimi Goudger, glibly.

"Brute!" sobbed Mildred.

THE blur faded from Booker's brain. Suddenly he saw them all

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as his mortal enemies. He crouched, waiting for Goudger's spring, and gripped the mallet in his hand.

"I hit you, eh?" he shouted. "All right, I'll do it again, too!"

Raising the mallet, he swung it outward.

Desmond Goudger ran right into it, stomach first.

Right then and there the riot started.

Mimi picked up a croquet ball and hit Mildred. Mildred tripped Mimi. A man fell over Mimi's legs and promptly lashed out at his neighbor.

And Tim Booker, yelling like an Irish banshee, charged on the mob, waving his mallet like a shillelagh.

"Out of my garden!" he screeched. "Out of here, all of you! You worthless, lily-livered bunch of croquet-playing fools! I'd rather have a hundred fairies on my hands than an ill-tempered gang of mortals like you!"

Behind him came the high, squeaking battle cry of the wee folk.

A shower of croquet balls rose from the grass to pelt the fleeing guests. Wickets rose out of nowhere to trip their flying feet. Mallets launched themselves miraculously from the grass and thudded into backsides.

And with oaths and imprecations, Tim Booker whirled his weapon and drove them from his garden. They ran for their cars, they ran for their lives—and Mildred and the Goudgers led all the rest.

Only when the last car whirled out of the driveway bearing the final group of frightened guests and Mildred as well, did Tim Booker check his rage.

He stood slumped in the twilight, sick with the realization of what he'd done. He'd lost his reputation, his job, and his wife, all in one fell swoop.

Panic gripped him.

"I've got to get out of here," he muttered. Without a backward glance, he turned and ran towards the house to pack his trunk.

THE panic was gone from Tim Booker's soul when he dumped his grips and trunk on the bed in the YMCA.

There was no frown on Booker's face. Surprisingly enough, he was grinning cheerfully as he sat down on a chair and removed his shoes.

This was the life, after all. For the first time he realized he hadn't lost anything that really mattered. He spoke aloud, sorting his random thoughts.

"Mildred and I were through a long time ago, I guess. I just didn't dare admit it to myself, that's all. Now I'm free, and she can find somebody else to nag.

"And I haven't got an old tyrant like Goudger on my neck, either. I'll find a better job right away."

He opened his suitcases, humming under his breath.

"Guess I owe those fairies a debt of gratitude after all. Good little people, those fairies. Hope they enjoy themselves there with the house to themselves."

He unstrapped his trunk and fumbled for a key.

"Come to think of it," he breathed, "I'm rid of them, too. Not that I don't appreciate what they've done for me. But spending my whole life with that crew of leprechauns would be pretty wearing. I'm glad *that* adventure is over."

He opened his trunk, began to take out his clothing. Then he stepped back, stiffened.

The drawers of the trunk were slowly opening outward. Booker's eyes popped.

From each of the six drawers a tiny face peered up at him with an elfin grin.

"You!" whispered Booker. "Here!"

"That's right," squeaked Nubbin,

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gaily. "It's here we are, my fine sir! After the fine way you protected us from those guests, did you ever for a minute think we'd be desertin' you? Ah no, me dear man—we've switched allegiance. From now on we're not Emmett O'Driscoll's wee folk any longer—we were after playing stowaway in yer trunk—and now we belong to you."

"You belong to me," said Booker, dully.

"For life!" answered Nubbin.

Booker held his head in his hands as he watched the six fairies scamper from the trunk and dance down across his bed.

This was the end. He'd have the fairies on his hands for the rest of his days now. How could he get a fresh start? How could he hope to carry out his plans—get a job in an airplane factory, for example.

An airplane factory!

Suddenly Tim Booker sat up and grinned.

"You're mine for life," he said. "You'll serve me faithfully?"

The six tiny heads nodded.

"Then listen here," said Booker. "I've got some orders."

For ten minutes the wee folk clustered about Tim Booker, climbing across his lap and nodding as he spoke.

Only once was there an interruption.

"But the iron—" said Thomakin.

"It's for your country!" snapped Tim Booker. "Remember that. We're all making sacrifices. And you'll stand contact with iron for such a cause."

They nodded again.

So Tim Booker, smiling happily, went to the telephone and called Washington, long distance. He waited for his connection, got his party, gave his name and address, and stated his business. It was a long conversation, but Booker got to the point.

"That's what I thought, sir," he said. "I'd read you were using midgets to crawl up inside and weld those tiny airplane parts. But I think I've got some workers who will do even better for you."

He glanced happily at the fairies on the bed.

"No, sir," said Tim Booker. "They're not exactly midgets. But you'd better hire them anyway. I can tell you one thing—I'd rather have them fighting for me than against me. And that's no fairy tale."

## MANGANESE FOR "CHICKIE'S" BONES

ACCORDING to Willis D. Gallup of the Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station, manganese, if properly administered, can be used to strengthen bone formation just as it is used in steel to give it greater strength.

It has been a rather common experience for breeders of poultry to have their birds become afflicted with a crippling disease known as leg-weakness or knock disease. Birds thus affected would not bring good prices in the market causing serious losses to the breeders.

The cause of this disease, according to Mr. Gallup, is a lack of manganese in the bird's diet. Other effects of the manganese-deficient diet is a decrease in egg production as well as an increased number of unhatched eggs. Moreover, once the birds get the disease they cannot be cured by adding manganese to the diet, but if properly given to them before the disease strikes it will not develop in the birds.

Present experiments, although not absolutely conclusive, show that the ratio of manganese required is about one part in one hundred thousand parts of feed. It is not essential that the manganese be obtained from ores for the metal exists in small amounts in most soils and thus become concentrated in green feeds and the outer coatings of grains.

Research on the effects of manganese have been conducted by other scientists and they have discovered that it is connected with the formation and utilization of the B and C vitamins. Another effect noted was that a very great absence of manganese in the diet caused a lapse in the animal's maternal instinct.

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# »»» Introducing «««

# THE AUTHOR

IT ISN'T often I get a request for a biography (as a matter of fact I had to request this one myself) and it's quite a problem deciding just what to say.

*Should I describe myself?* The picture herewith ought to tell its own story. I'm tall, thin, and twenty-six. I have one wife and innumerable brain-children. I live in a small apartment located somewhere between squalor and abject poverty.

*How did I break into writing?* I started out may back in '38 writing fantasy yarns for a magazine called "Strange Stories." The magazine died, but I didn't. I drifted off into the advertising game, by fits and starts. (I threw innumerable fits and made many false starts.)

Then, one evening in last December, I found myself in the palatial apartment of RAP, a little-known figure in the world of fantastic fiction. He was host to a small party of writers including Bill McGivern, David Wright O'Brien, Howard Browne, Leroy Yerxa, and Robert Bloch. These word-merchants were engaged in a friendly game of poker, and as I saw them casually peel off $100 bills from massive wads of currency, my ambition kindled.

I, too, would become a writer again—for sheer love of it! (Love of money, I mean).

No sooner said than done. I dashed home, dashed off a story, and I'll be double-dashed if it didn't sell! Since that time you can't tear me away from my typewriter. I know, because the finance company tried it.

*Why did I come to write* "It's a Small World"?* Frankly, I owe a debt to William Brengle's Lilliputian story for inspiring the notion. I read his tale, thought to myself, "There's a nice yarn." Then I kept right on thinking.

Lilliputians . . . fascinating figures for story material . . . but authors always put their tiny protagonists in strange, exotic settings. Swift did. The author of "Dr. Cyclops" followed suit. Ray Cummings' stories follow the pattern.

To me, there was more of a story in the adventures of human mannikins in ordinary backgrounds. More horror and more outlandish situations in a child's nursery, for example.

Tarleton Fiske

As an unusual idea, the problem of writing such a story appealed to me. So I wrote it, and hope it appeals to you! —*Tarleton Fiske.*

P. S. I hope the fans realize that this photograph of me is just a gag. You see, I really can't read!

* *The story for which Mr. Fiske wrote this autobiographical sketch will appear in a later issue, having been crowded out by its length, to be replaced by "Fairy Tale." Strangely enough, this new story is also about tiny beings, and the editors believe you will be fascinated by both yarns.*—ED.

FOR THE BEST IN SCIENCE FICTION—AMAZING STORIES



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# READER'S PAGE

### WE ASK FOR IT—WE GET IT!

Sirs:

Let me point out that using three and one-half pages for your own ramblings, but allowing only one page for reader's opinions is a rather seedy procedure. There should be at least three or four pages for letters and remarks.

W. S. BURGESON,
2300 16th Ave., So.,
Minneapolis, 4, Minn.

*It just happened that way, Mr. Burgeson. As you'll notice, this month we devote four pages to reader's letters. As for our own ramblings, heck, Mr. Burgeson, we could tell you the Ed's Notebook has been the most popular feature in the book since its inception, but we won't—we'll just say doggonit, we like to shoot off our mouth, and this is our only chance to place a lot of people in the position of being at our mercy. Ordinarily, nobody listens to us, and it does things to our ego!*—ED.

### NOW WE GIVE IT OUT!

Sirs:

In the recent issue of FA you expressed a desire for more letters from readers. Or at least, better letters. But you don't seem to be printing any at all, in comparison to last year. I'm going to tell you why that is—that readers don't write as much as they used to. It's because you've lost most of your former readers, completely and definitely through the undeniably lousy stories that have appeared so far this year.

Please, a more dignified cover in the future. In fact, a more dignified whole magazine. Most of the other magazines are undergoing changes, which, while they are not in all cases for the better, are at least changes. So I want a change in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, too.

R. J. GRUEBNER,
2910 N. Major Ave.,
Chicago, Illinois.

*What makes you think we don't get as many letters as we used to? You missed the boat that time! We get more letters than we ever did. So many that we have to keep a separate file just for letters from readers. What we want are letters which say more than just the usual listing of stories, which of course we still want, so we know what you like to read, but for this column we want more interesting letters. And another thing you don't know anything about is the "loss of our former readers." We have all our former readers, and we get letters from those old faithfuls every month. And our only regret is that we haven't the paper to accommodate all our new readers! Lousy stories? Boy, you should read* all *our letters from readers! You'd begin to feel mighty lonely!*

*Especially are you wrong about our covers. Our readers agree emphatically our covers are the best on any pulps, and that they are even worthy of framing for their dens. We'll take that kind of dignity! As for other magazines making changes, we wonder why? Most magazines have no trouble selling these days—and certainly need no experimenting to make them sell. Why change a good thing for something not as good, as you suggest, just for the sake of "change"? Frankly, we don't understand what you are talking about. However, we have just hit on something interesting to improve our next issues. Something you fans will go for in a big way. Watch for it in the next issue of our sister magazine,* Amazing Stories! —ED.

### YERXA MAKES MISTAKES

Sirs:

After the last fine issue of FANTASTIC ADVEN-



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TURES, I feel almost duty-bound to tell you how much I enjoy your magazine.

Yerxa's "Lost Legions of Carthage" was a most clever and absorbing tale. It was partly spoiled for me, however, because of certain technical slip-ups. In the story Hannibal is portrayed as a young, handsome fellow, while in reality he was a grizzled, one-eyed, fifty-year-old at the end of his career as leader of Carthage's armies.

"Pilum" and gladius" are both Latin, not Carthaginian terms, and both words are the names of weapons which the Carthaginians never used. In fact, these particular weapons happen to be the main stand-bys of their enemies, the Romans. The "gladius" was a special type of short sword which was the principal hand weapon of the Roman infantryman, while the Carthaginians relied principally upon the long sword and curved scimitar for in-fighting.

The "pilum," or javelin, was used as a sort of light artillery barrage to temporarily smother enemy resistance during a charge by *Roman* infantry. The Carthaginians relied upon bowmen for their version of this special shock effect.

I hope that, after this, Mr. Yerxa will not partially weaken the effect of his splendid stories by the incorrect use of detail. Despite my seeming dissatisfaction with FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, I really believe that your mag. is 1-A in the science-fiction field. Keep up the good work!

LEONARD H. CARYL,
5 Waldron Street,
West Lafayette, Ind.

*Well, Yerxa, what about it?*—ED.

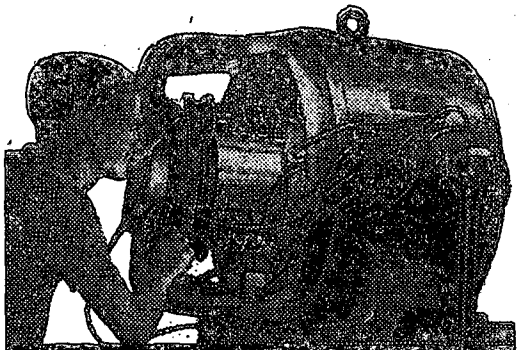
## A READER AGREES

Sirs:

The June issue is the best in many a month. Both McGivern's and Leroy Yerxa's stories headed the list, with about all the rest second. Lefty Feep is still excellent, as was the gremlin story. But, by far the best of the shorter stories was "Citadel of Hate." It was by far the best fantasy I have ever read. Besides placing the story in Haiti, Lee Francis put in Christophe and LeFerrier. What more could a fantasy reader want? I'm surprised that other writers haven't written about the black king, or his fortress of blood. However, if they do, I feel sure the stories won't come up to this one. That was an excellent picture of his fortress on page 163, too.

Now I come to your note in the Reader's Page. I certainly agree with you. There ought to be more discussion. However, I like to see what other people think of various stories, too, so couldn't we vote on the stories, and get acquainted too? As for getting acquainted, you only printed three letters this issue. How, then, are we to get acquainted? I think, though, that you are right about having more talk.

As for the Editor's Notebook, I think your idea for teaching South American languages is excellent. And for that matter, so is our FANTASTIC

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ADVENTURES Hall of Fame idea.

WILLIAM N. PERSHING,
West Stockbridge, Mass.

*Yerxa will be delighted to know he clicked with you. Also, Lee Francis and William P. McGivern. Robert Fuqua, the artist, prides himself on the accuracy of his work. As for the length of this department, we believe that it will grow, because letters are beginning to show some signs of originality in subject and life in presentation, and we'll carefully build the department up to a real "socker." So have patience with us. We're going to do some thinking about that voting idea too. However, it is a matter of business sense to keep our own secrets of success. Readers do us a great favor by telling us which stories are best, and we give them more of the same. Usually, the opinions of the vast majority of readers are alike, and in your case, you show very good judgment. We received so much comment on our Hall of Fame idea, we decided to really make it count, and we are going to give a complete list from our magazine's inception. This means checking vast piles of letters for a composite opinion. We want the list to be correct. We promise it next issue, however, and then each month thereafter, if a new story rates inclusion, announcement will be made. We are planning to make some sort of a merit award too, probably in the nature of a certificate to be presented to the author.*—ED.

## FANTASY VERSUS SCIENCE

Sirs:

I want to congratulate an author of yours who seems to have gotten an inspiration. I'm speaking of Leroy Yerxa who seems at last to have pulled himself up from the pits of hackdom. For, while it was not the best story in the June FA, "Lost Legions of Carthage" *was* a darned good yarn. Yerxa has improved very much, and it takes a good author to do just that. I only hope he can continue improving and that this was not just a flash in the pan.

May I offer a suggestion? Your magazine is leaning too far toward gremlins, zombies, screwy robots, and screwier stories. Let's keep FA the kind of a magazine it started out to be—a fantasy magazine with a touch of science fiction. The difference between fantasy and science is very slight anyhow.

I have nothing against new writers, but they seldom compare with the old-timers. In the June FA, *only one author,* Bloch, has ever appeared on a contents page other than those of the Ziff-Davis publications. It's nice to be exclusive, but the readers don't buy a magazine because it is exclusive—they want good stories. And I sincerely think that the older authors write better stories than the newer men.

CHAD OLIVER,
3956 Ledgewood,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

*We think readers of tomorrow will look back at Leroy Yerxa as one of those "older authors who write better stories" that you mention. Your*

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*point about slight difference is wrong, to our way of thinking. We started* FANTASTIC ADVENTURES *because we realized there was a definite difference, and we felt it required two magazines to fully cover the field, and fully satisfy two distinct reader preferences. Thus, we try to place incoming manuscripts into two definite categories (which is sometimes very difficult because a yarn may contain* both *science and fantasy—in which case it usually goes into fantasy). We aren't going to concentrate too much on gremlins, zombies, etc. In fact, we consciously limit each subject as it comes up. We have one more gremlin story, and one more zombie story. We are advising our writers to refrain from working any one subject to death. As for the authors in our June issue never appearing elsewhere, you are plenty all wet! Geier, Bloch, O'Brien, Yerxa, Fiske, all appear in many other publications. And we'd hate to tell you how many of these same boys appear under other names in other magazines—simply because we prefer to retain the drawing power of their own names which we built up, for our own magazines, which is only fair, don't you think? And also, we pay the highest pulp rates for that right. We don't give you exclusives—we give you the* best! *Certainly you don't object to our efforts to protect* you!—ED.

## REPRINTS

Sirs:

My husband and I are enjoying the stories in this Summer issue of *Fantastic Adventures Quarterly,* and in glancing through it I find letters to you asking for reprints of old stories. Reprints of old stories is a good idea, and an excellent way to solve some of this labor shortage. I imagine you have lost lots of your authors to different fields of service.

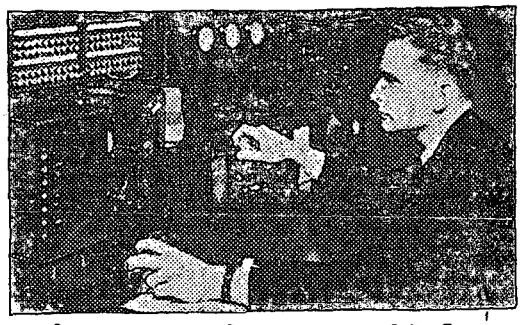
The reprint I am interested in appeared some time between 1926 and 1930 and is probably forgotten by present readers. It was "The Bridge of Light." I don't remember the author, but it appeared as a serial. I read the story two or three times at the time. Please see what can be done about locating and printing this story in another quarterly.

MRS. W. E. INMAN,
2062 Rome Drive,
Los Angeles, Calif.

*"The Bridge of Light" was written by A. Hyatt Verrill, the famous explorer, and was published in the Fall, 1929 Quarterly, not a serial, but complete in one issue. Contrary to your belief, we don't have a writer shortage, although many of your regulars have gone to war. In fact, we have decided against reprints, because they don't measure up as a rule to new stories, and we must consider our writers who have to live too. We would rather buy new stuff from them, and retain them as writers, than see them lost by reason of abandoning their talents, which are rare and something to be fostered for the future.*

*This month has resulted in quite a few interesting letters, and we foresee a very lively column from now on. All of which means more work for your editor, but he loves it—so keep on writing, and don't spare the horses. We can take it!*—ED.


# Be a Radio Technician



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# WARRIORS OF OTHER WORLDS

## By MORRIS J. STEELE

**The fighting man of Callisto is also a farmer—and he must be a fighter because of the swarms of vampire monkeys which infest its jungles and raid its farms**

(See Back Cover)

CALLISTO is very similar in size to our own Luna, being 3,220 miles in diameter, which makes it a trifle larger. Thus, just as our own moon once might have had a civilization, so does Callisto offer these possibilities. However, Callisto is a member of a much younger planetary system (Jupiter's family of nine satellites) and obviously would not be in any advanced state of civilized advancement.

Callisto, or satellite IV, is 1,168,700 miles from the center of Jupiter. This would make it about five times as far from its parent as our moon is from Earth. Callisto rotates on its axis once each sixteen days, sixteen hours, and thirty-two plus seconds. Which gives it a day very similar to that of our own moon, which is fourteen days.

Because the satellite gets light and heat from two sources, Jupiter and the sun, it has a "daytime" which also constitutes a "season" of approximately twenty days, during which time vegetation grows, assumes its maturity, and becomes harvestable.

Much heat, and radio-active rays from Jupiter's giant red spot, aid this rapid growth cycle, and tropical plants are the rule. Perhaps the most common of these is the excellent "tobacco" leaves that form miniature jungles.

Although the inhabitants of Callisto consider that smoking is a filthy habit, they have found that raising tobacco on their farms for shipment to Earth is a very profitable enterprise. Therefore, they have concentrated on harvesting and caring for the leaves to the exclusion of all else —which would ordinarily not be a difficult task, because not much else can grow on this swiftly moving (insofar as the seasons are concerned) world.

However, Callisto is cursed with another inhabitant, the destructive crimson vampire monkeys. Earth people shudder when they hear of these vampire monkeys, but the truth is, they are vampiric insofar as the tobacco jungles are concerned only. They live by the food provided by the stalks of the tobacco plant, subsisting on the peculiar crimson sap of the prized vegetation.

Since it is necessary for a vampire monkey to store up enough food to last it over the dark season, when no vegetation grows, and to carry it over its hibernation period, the vampire monkey must spend almost all of its day season in eating. This necessity results in great destruction among the tobacco plants.

The inhabitants of Callisto have thus been forced to become fighters in the strict sense of the word, forming protective guard battalions to protect the tobacco plants in the growing stage when the sap still flows in the stalks, and the leaves are immature. This period lasts perhaps twelve days and during these twelve days a constant battle goes on.

Armed with compressed air pellet guns, the guards patrol the tobacco jungles and maintain a constant march through the fields themselves, flushing up feeding vampire monkeys, who have a habit of feeding in groups of perhaps ten to fifteen, probably for their own protection. They climb nearby trees, instantly they are discovered, and launch themselves into the air just as do the flying monkeys of Earth. They possess sharp teeth (used to cut into the tough tobacco leaf stalks) and sharp claws.

Their bite is not particularly dangerous to the warrior of Callisto, because he has undergone treatment to innure him to the concentrated nicotine poison of the vampires. An Earthman, however, would die in a matter of hours from the bite, from the incredibly concentrated nicotine in his blood, which would cause disastrous heart action and ruptured blood vessels.

Yet, if enough bites are received by a Callistonian, he will be put out of action for several weeks while he undergoes treatment to remove the poison from his system.

Generally, these guards travel in pairs, one in the lead, with a hand weapon which it is possible to bring into quick action at close range.

When a covey of the crimson vampire monkeys is flushed, the leading man concentrates on those nearest him, and the man in the rear, using a rifle with a rapid-fire mechanism, sprays the monkeys who scramble for the trees to launch themselves into the air. Some of the monkeys are agile enough to get into the air from the ground, and in this case, the guard in the lead has his hands full.

Occasionally, in narrow fields, it is necessary to go nearer to the trees, and the crimson monkeys have a nasty habit of hiding in the branches, and then launching out in attack. In this event, the man following up cannot help his companion immediately, at risk of hitting him too. So, while he closes the gap to within a range possible to pick off the fringe of attackers, the lead man may go down and thus helpless, have his throat slashed.



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# THE MIRACLE OF CARBON

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A brief idea of how many substances have been synthesized is given by the figure of five hundred thousand. This is a barren and empty number without elaboration. Carbon itself exists in several forms which are quite important: the diamonds, both black and sparkling, are carbon; so, too, are soot, charcoal and the coke of coal.

Organic chemistry is especially appreciated by the petroleum industry. Chemists there, have done wonders in increasing the yield of gasoline and important products as well as in purification, and addition of antiknock compounds. The organic chemists have not stopped here. We all know about the rubber problems. But what is rubber if not a carbon compound as are fuel oil and gasoline. Knowing this, the chemists are working madly, desperately to supply better processes, a greater yield for the manufacture of this vital commodity, and they shall succeed, because they know they must.

How about our sugars and starches? Are they exempt from this seemingly all inclusive category? No, they are not. Much of the purification and increase in supply as well as the ability to synthesize is due to the work of the organic chemists.

Explosives are for the most part military secrets yet they too are organic carbon compounds. Our silk, much of which will be synthetic, is an example of the benefits insured to the public by the chemist. And who has not heard of bakelite, hard and non-conducting. This material finds much use in the electrical industries as well as electric railroads for it does not expand or contract as do our metals.

Is this all? Heavens no! The vitamins, which we are all taking these days, and becoming the healthier for it, are also organic compounds. They are made synthetically but just as good as those produced by our own bodies. And why not, is there anything these brilliant hands and minds cannot make?

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From this book, He says, "You can learn the arts of an old Science as practiced by the Ancient Priestly Orders. Their marvels were almost beyond belief. You, too, can learn to do them all with the instructions written in this Book," Lewis de Claremont claims. "It would be a shame if these things could all be yours and you failed to grasp them."

He claims, "It is every man's birthright to have these things of life: MONEY! GOOD HEALTH! HAPPINESS! If you lack any of these, then this book has an important message for you. No matter what you need, there exists a spiritual power which is abundantly able to bring you whatever things you need."

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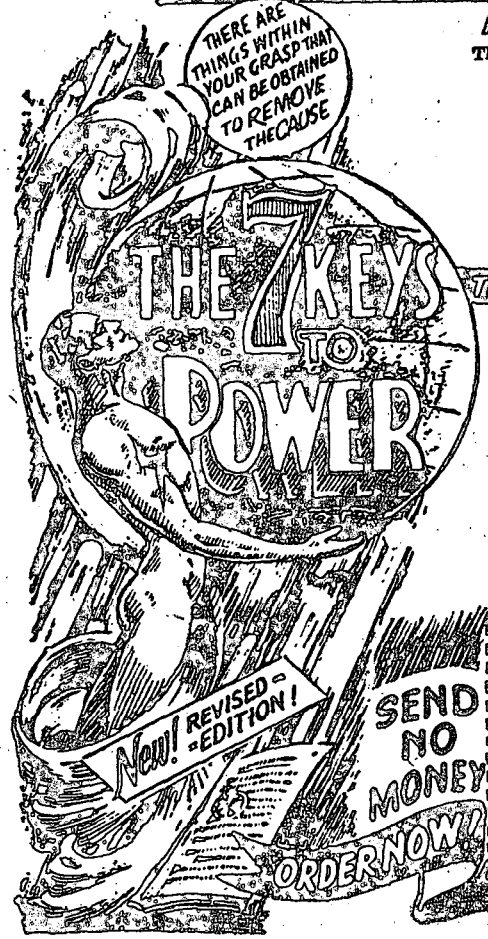


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- Make people do your bidding.
- Make any person love you.
- Make people bring back stolen goods.
- Make anyone lucky in any games.
- Cure any kind of sickness without medicine.
- Get any job you want.
- Cast a spell on anyone, no matter where they are.
- Get people out of law suits, courts, or prison.
- Banish all misery.
- Gain the mastery of all things.
- Regain your youth and vigor.
- Choose words according to ancient, holy methods.

THE ONLY TRUE BOOK OF SUPREME MASTERSHIP!

This is the Power, He says, from which the old masters gained their knowledge and from which they sold limitless portions to certain favored Kings, Priests, and others at high prices, but never to be revealed under a vow, the violation of which entailed severe punishment.

THE VOW HAS NOW BEEN BROKEN

This book, he claims, shows you the secrets of old which when properly applied makes you able to control the will of all without their knowing it. If you have a problem and you wish to solve it, he says, don't hesitate. Advertisements cannot describe nor do this wonderful book justice. You must read it and digest its meaning, to really appreciate its worth.

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# She SAID: I'm sorry I can't go with you tonight..

# But She really THOUGHT: I'm ashamed to be seen out with such a SKINNY WEAKLING!

DO YOU ever get the "brush-off"? Do girls ever tell YOU "they have a headache"—and then the headache turns out to be another date? Well—girls just seem to prefer going out with a husky, muscular HE-MAN! And if you want to start building a HE-MAN'S body for YOURSELF, just listen:

## Give Me Just 15 Minutes a Day—and I'll PROVE I Can Make YOU a NEW MAN!

**CHARLES ATLAS**
An actual untouched photo of Charles Atlas, holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

I CAN show you dozens of pictures of skinny, scrawny weaklings that I've helped to become brawny, big-muscled supermen! I'll show you a picture of myself at 17—a spider-legged, sparrow-chested specimen—and then compare it with this picture of me today! What I did for those other men—and for myself—let me PROVE I can do for YOU, too!

I can begin showing you RESULTS the very first week. REAL results, MUSCLE-results. You'll soon have INCHES—of—powerful—muscle—along your arms. Broad, powerful shoulders. Husky chest. Strong, muscle-ridged back and stomach—legs lithe and springy. I'll give you a firm, viselike grip. I'll fill your whole system so full of new vigor and vitality that you won't even KNOW YOURSELF! vitality! You'll be using the muscle-power you have NOW to build the muscle-power you WANT to have!

—Charles Atlas

### How Can I Do It?

In just 15 minutes a day, right in your own room, my method of *"Dynamic Tension"* will start molding your body into rugged health and strength. *"Dynamic Tension"* is nature's own body-building system. No apparatus, or artificial muscle-makers. Before long you'll be using *"Dynamic Tension"* unconsciously during the day—walking, bending over, while sitting down, resting—to build muscle and

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## WARRIORS OF OTHER WORLDS

**This is the fighting man of Callisto, tropical fourth satellite of Jupiter, being attacked by the crimson vampire monkeys of its tobacco-leaf jungles.** **(See page 208 for complete story.)**

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